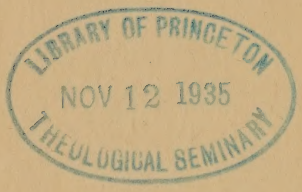
# PREACHING THE APOCALYPSE

DANIEL RUSSELL

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# PREACHING THE APOCALYPSE

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RUSSELL
PREACHING THE APOCALYPSE

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*To*

M. R. D.

IN

PARTIAL PAYMENT

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## LILIUM REGIS[1]

"O Lily of the King! low lies thy silver wing,
And long has been the hour of thine unqueening;
And thy scent of Paradise on the night-wind spills its sighs,
Nor any take the secrets of its meaning.
O Lily of the King! I speak a heavy thing,
O patience, most sorrowful of daughters!
Lo, the hour is at hand for the troubling of the land,
And red shall be the breaking of the waters.

"Sit fast upon thy stalk, when the blast shall with thee talk,
With the mercies of the King for thine awning;
And the just understand that thine hour is at hand,
Thine hour at hand with power in the dawning.
When the nations lie in blood, and their kings a broken brood,
Look up, O most sorrowful of daughters!
Lift up thy head and hark what sounds are in the dark,
For His feet are coming to thee on the waters!

"O Lily of the King! I shall not see, that sing,
I shall not see the hour of thy queening!
But my Song shall see, and wake like a flower that dawn-winds shake,
And sigh with joy the odours of its meaning.
O Lily of the King, remember then the thing
That this dead mouth sang; and thy daughters,
As they dance before His way, sing there on the Day
What I sang when the Night was on the waters!"

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[1] From *The Works of Francis Thompson. Poems.* Vol. I, p. 151. Used by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

# PREFACE

THIS book is written primarily for working preachers who, like myself, face each year (not, let us hope, each week!) the question, "What to preach."

My purpose is to suggest some of the preaching values in the book of Revelation. For, with the exception of certain monumental texts, and of passages used at funerals, few preachers turn for their material to the Apocalypse.

The reasons for this are fairly obvious. First, it is an obscure book. Scholars differ concerning its date, its structure, its authorship, and its meanings. While the literature which has sprung up around it in the last half century throws much light upon its pages, there are, in all probability, parts of it which we shall never understand. It is promised that as we discover and examine more of the apocalyptic sources from which the seer drew we shall come to fuller understanding. This is doubtless true. Yet with full knowledge of his sources there is much of Browning which we do not readily understand. Our prophet-poet is the Robert Browning of the Bible.

Another good reason for avoidance is that Revelation has been a source book for religious cranks from time immemorial. The lunatic fringe among both clergy and laity have always found in it a happy hunting ground. They have found its strange predictions fulfilled in the establishment of Christianity under Constantine; in the rise of Mohammedanism; in the more regrettable portions of Roman Catholic history; in the

Protestant Reformation; and in the World War. The Pope is antichrist, so the Protestants once said. One of the beasts is the Protestant Church, so the Catholics said; and the beast numbered six hundred and sixty-six in chapter thirteen, verse eighteen, is doubtless Martin Luther! Now we are told that the National Recovery Act is prophesied here, for we may read in chapter thirteen, verse seventeen, "No man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark . . . of the beast." The fact that the Blue Eagle is not a beast but a bird is a detail which does not seemingly affect the prophecy!

To ministers who, like myself, have shied away from Revelation for the reasons given above, I offer my own adventure in the Isle of Patmos in the hope that it may be encouragingly suggestive.

The preaching values of Revelation might be presented in various ways. I give them here as I presented them to my congregation over a period of thirty consecutive Sundays. In a few instances a congruent passage from some other part of the Bible was used for the Scripture lesson, the preaching period being devoted to a straight exposition of the Revelation chapter. Usually the passage from Revelation was read and explained from the reading desk, and a text from it used as the basis of the sermon at the sermon period. What I have written attempts to show how the Apocalypse—its general structure, its detailed meanings, and its spiritual treasures for practical, everyday religious life—was actually presented to an audience.

The audience liked it. This is my encouragement in committing the experiment to print.

The text of Revelation is omitted in the interest of saving space. The brief expositions require the reader

to have his New Testament at hand. The interpretations are offered in no dogmatic spirit, but reflect only the author's best judgment in identifying the kernel of most probable truth in masses of critical opinion which are often surprisingly and discouragingly divergent. The comment attempts to do little beyond making the various chapters intelligible. For those who wish to delve deeper the following works are suggested:

Articles in *Encyclopaedia Britannica:* "Apocalyptic Literature" and "Millennium."

Articles in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible:* "Apocalyptic Literature," "Revelation," "Parousia," "Angels," "Eschatology of the Apocalyptic Literature," "John, Apostle," "Millennium," "Man of Sin."

Discussions and Lectures: R. H. Charles, *Lectures on the Apocalypse.* Milligan, Expositor's Bible. *Lectures on the Apocalypse. Discussions on the Apocalypse.* Porter, *Messages of the Apocalyptic Books.* Charles F. Wishart, *The Book of Day.*

Commentaries: Alford, in Greek Testament. Beckwith, "The Apocalypse of John." R. H. Charles, in The International Critical Commentary. Moffatt, in Expositor's Greek Testament. C. Anderson Scott, in The Century Bible Series.

The monumental commentary is that of R. H. Charles. It is highly technical and at times would seem to base radical conclusions on too slender critical evidence. Yet it is the foundation for any exhaustive study of the book. Beckwith is extraordinarily useful. If one can possess but one of the above authorities, C. Anderson Scott is preferable. His commentary is a marvel of wise condensation, takes account of all previous work in the field up to the date of its publication, is remark-

able in many other ways, and, fortunately, the price is small.

A strange, baffling, thrilling book this Revelation. Perhaps John Calvin was prudent when he refused to write a commentary on it, whereupon the younger Scaliger, a famous classical scholar, remarked, with a chuckle, *"Calvinus sapit quod in Apocalypsin non scripsit."* But one remembers that Calvin, greatest exegete of his age, had neither the critical apparatus nor the results of wide study in apocalyptic literature which help so much to-day in unraveling the difficulties of the book. Also, incidentally, one recalls a story told by Dr. Rufus Jones: A New England fisherman had been soundly converted in a revival meeting. He became a lay preacher, preaching on one occasion from the text, "Thou knowest I am an oysterman." When it was pointed out to him that the text should read, "Thou knowest I am an austere man," he replied: "Well, I don't care. I got six converts anyway."

Here is convert-making material, comfort for saints, warnings for the wicked, and a momentous setting forth of the eternal truths of the Christian faith which center about the living, dying, resurrected and glorified Redeemer. Here are values neglected because unrecognized; treasures unappropriated because hidden. That he who reads may better find, recognize, appropriate, and proclaim is the prayer of the writer.

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## INTRODUCTION

THERE are three questions which we naturally ask when we read a book. Who wrote it? Why was it written? When was it written? These questions do not press for answer in the case of an ordinary volume. There are scores of novels which we read merely as a literature of escape. These three questions are only raised by a casual curiosity. But in the case of an important book which deals with God and human destiny, and is couched in sublime and mysterious language, these queries are not merely academic and casual but vital.

When was the book written? We do not know precisely. Nearly all authorities agree that it belongs to the last half of the first century. By some it is placed as early as the year 51; by some as late as the year 96. A possible date is about the year 77, after the first great persecution, under Nero, and before the second great persecution under Domitian. The weight of evidence now points to 95 A. D.

Why was the book written? It was to comfort and hold steady and strong a church in dire extremity. The very life of the young Christian society was threatened both from within and from without—on the one hand by heresy and the corruptions of the pagan world, on the other by Roman persecutions, often incited by the Jews.

At the beginning, so long as the infant church was confined to Palestine, it was not too difficult for her to hold herself apart, unspotted from the world. But the

church spread rapidly. At the time the Revelation was written it had entered Asia Minor, where the environment was wholly different, and continued separation a difficult problem. The earliest Christians were, for the most part, poor. Here in Asia Minor they had a good chance to get rich. They did get rich. And the tendency was, as always, to forget, in the possession of material values, the claims of the spiritual. This condition is forcibly portrayed in chapter three, verse seventeen, as John writes to the Laodiceans: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Christians were also mingling socially with their neighbors until the old lines of distinction, so essential to their spiritual welfare, were in danger of being altogether broken down. There was grave peril that their first love might be lost, swallowed up into the maw of a vast, encompassing paganism.

In addition to these inner forces of deterioration destructive forces were working from without. The church had been persecuted by the unbelieving Jews from the first. But the more serious and deadly persecution was that of the Roman government. On the night of July nineteen, 64 A. D., fire broke out in the city of Rome. It raged for six days and six nights. It is the belief of many historians that Nero set the fire himself, desiring to destroy the old city that he might erect one more magnificent, then accused the Christians in order to divert suspicion from his own part in the crime. The public would readily accept the charge against the Christians because they were generally regarded as a Jewish sect, and it has always been easy,

whether in Rome or Berlin, to fan a flame of fanatic hate against the Jew. The Christians were executed by hundreds. The thing was made a festival. In Nero's gardens, where now stands the palace of Saint Peter's, some were crucified, some sewn in raw skins of wild animals and given to dogs to worry and devour, some rolled in pitch, bound to tall poles, and burned at night as living torches. This persecution was restricted for the moment to Rome, but its effects were far-reaching. The leaders of the church, including John, knew that it might be expected to break out anywhere. The Master's word was true: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. . . . Because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." And they would be hated, not only in Rome but throughout the Roman world.

Thus, the greater tribulations loomed ahead. It was for these that John would prepare the church. The emperor Augustus, twenty-nine years after the death of Christ, permitted the erection of temples in which he, Augustus, was to be worshiped as Deity. This, which was merely permissive, became mandatory under succeeding emperors. The Jews were always alert to discover Christians who violated the code, refusing the imperial edict, and to denounce them to Cæsar's spies. These Christians would not worship the emperor; therefore they were traitors to the state. It was on this charge—that he was an enemy of the state—that Jesus had been done to death. Now that the method of elimination had worked so well in his case, why not try it on his disciples, where, doubtless, it would work equally well? John saw with prophetic eye that which

within a few years must come to pass. Maligned and denounced by the Jews, the Christians would fall victims to the Roman sword. And the crucial choice which would be offered them was whether they would fall down and worship the "beast," the Roman emperor, or stand firm and die if need be for their faith in Christ. Eternal destiny would hang upon their choice. Cæsar or Christ? Loyalty to the Lamb of God who had died for them; or submission to the incarnation of diabolic wickedness sitting on the throne of Rome? And seeing all these fightings within and foes without, John makes his purpose clear. He will say to the church in Asia Minor what Paul said to the Ephesians: "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." "And having done all . . . stand."

Who wrote the book? The answer to this question has been discussed in thousands of pages for more than fifteen centuries. There are those who deny its unity, and declare it a compilation of the work of various authors. Some hold that it is the work of a disciple who was known as John the Presbyter. But when the long debates are concluded and the evidence fairly weighed, there seems to be no compelling reason for rejecting the traditional view that the writer is John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee.

Thus the argument runs: The church, down to the year 240, did not question the Johannine authorship.

The unbroken tradition held by those most likely to know the truth, over a period of two and one half centuries, is not to be lightly set aside.

There is nothing in the character of the author as revealed in the Apocalypse which is out of harmony with the character of John as revealed in the Gospels. This has been challenged. It has been said that the quiet, pietistic, mystical John, John the beloved disciple of love, whose symbol in the early church was the dove, could not have written this thunderous book with its imagery of terror, doom, and transcendent glory. But this is to forget the incident of Mark 3, where John would have called down fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village. It is to forget that Jesus called James and John sons of thunder. It is to forget that James and John sent their mother to Jesus to ask for positions at his right hand and his left in his *"glory,"* which suggests that the glorified Christ, an insistent idea of Revelation, was already in John's mind. It is to forget that when Jesus asked them, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" they responded with a stalwart, "We are able." Apostle of love? Certainly John was that. But he was also a man of leonine strength, who might have composed the stirring paragraphs of the Apocalypse.

Whoever reads the Revelation will realize that the author, who calls himself "John," assumes authority. Also that he is intimately familiar with the inner life and circumstances of the church in Asia Minor. If any other man of that time had such authority, and also knew these churches so well, no one knows who he was. Had there been such a man, it is incredible that he

should have vanished from the life-story of the church leaving so little trace.

But is it not true that in Revelation we find ourselves in a different atmosphere from that of the Gospel and Epistles commonly attributed to John? Yes, that is true. But as we look more closely the superficial differences grow less and less while the fundamental similarities grow more and more. There is resemblance in that the same characteristic words are common to all the writings. To "witness," to "tabernacle," "to keep," "to overcome," appear and reappear. "Name" as the expression of character; "hunger and thirsting," "manna," "living water," "shepherd" and "sheep" and Jesus as the "Lamb of God," appear in both. These are only a few of the inner similarities. A close student of the book will find many more. The main section of the Gospel, chapters five to twelve, contains a denunciation of the Jews which is paralleled throughout a considerable part of Revelation. Not only are the characteristic words identical, but the important doctrines are identical. As for the person of Christ, it is in these two books, and only in these two books that he is described as "the Word," and "the Lamb." In each, Christ's death and resurrection are combined in a closeness of conception which is not to be met with elsewhere: "I lay down my life, that I might take it again," says the Gospel. "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold I am alive for evermore," says the Revelation. The verb "to will" is stressed in both books and given outstanding prominence, while the conception of mankind as divided by a rigid line into two great classes—saved and unsaved—is the same in Gospel and Apocalypse.

For these reasons, and others which might be stated,

we can believe that nothing has been put forward which shakes, fatally, the testimony of antiquity, that the John who speaks in Revelation is none other than he who leaned upon the Lord's breast at the Last Supper. "John to the seven churches which are in Asia," says the first chapter. "I John saw these things, and heard them," so declares the last chapter. To the question, "Who wrote the book?" we may answer, "John the apostle." And this without dogmatic certainty, but with the conviction that it is the oldest, simplest, and most satisfactory solution of the problem of authorship.

Nevertheless, we must cheerfully admit that the simplest explanation may not be the correct one. Gospel and Apocalypse may have been written by two different authors. The inner correspondence referred to may arise from this, that the author of Revelation was related to the man who wrote the Gospel either as master or pupil, or the two were pupils of the same master, or were members of the same group or school. While it is true that the fourth Gospel and the three Epistles are "commonly attributed" to the apostle, this is far from being a unanimous conclusion among critical scholars. Again, there are able scholars who hold that John the apostle never was in Asia Minor, and that he died a martyr's death between the years 64 and 70 A. D., a quarter of a century or more before the probable date of the composition of the book. And beyond these considerations there is the impressive fact that, under the sedulous microscope of critical inspection, important linguistic evidence appears, which makes it difficult to believe that Gospel and Apocalypse were composed by the same writer. For the homiletic purposes of the studies contained in the chapters of this

volume, however, the Johannine authorship is usually assumed.

There are striking differences in grammar. The fourth Gospel uses μή with the participle eleven times, and the genitive absolute often; the Apocalypse neither. The attracted relative is common in the Gospel; in the Apocalypse it never occurs. There are striking differences of diction. In the Apocalypse we find πίστις four, and πιστός eight times; the Gospel uses πίστις not at all, πιστός once, πιστεύειν nearly a hundred times. Wherever the Greek equivalent of "called" or "named" is required, the Apocalypse invariably gives καλειν, the Gospel λέγειν. Again, our author always uses κατοικεῖν of living in a certain place. The Gospel does not know the term in this connection, the word most usually employed being μένειν. While the Gospel uses καθώς thirty-one times, Revelation always employs ὡς to express the same sense. Words, or phrases having one meaning in the Apocalypse and another in the Gospel number at least fifteen.

The list of these contrasts might be greatly extended, but enough has been said to warn us against unseemly certainty in asserting the apostolic authorship of the book. While there is a high degree of probability that John the apostle wrote both books the evidence is not conclusive. The way of wisdom—and modesty—lies in saying simply: We do not know who wrote the Revelation. Whoever he was he was a God-intoxicated man, a man whose spiritual authority is unquestionable and self-evidencing.

But when we are done with the questions of date, authorship, and purpose, there are two further questions to be considered by way of introduction. First,

there is the problem of the general interpretation of the Apocalypse. Here there are three main schools of thought. The *preterist* system sees the principal prophecies of the book fulfilled in the events of the present, or immediate future, including the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of Rome. The *continuous-historical* system sees the book as embracing conditions and movements in the church and the world from the seer's era to the end of time. The *futurist* system sees all the events foretold in Revelation as taking place in connection with the millennium and the Final Judgment. However, few scholars follow rigidly any one of these concepts. The book is best conceived as falling only partially into any one of the three molds. It was not devoted primarily to events which had already come to pass. It was primarily a book for the troubled present in which it was penned. But it moves beyond this, in its essential truths, out into all future time and all eternity. It has elements which are both important and contemporary; it has other elements which are supremely essential, eternal, and therefore imperishably precious.

Of prime importance among these essential and eternal elements are the *doctrines* of Revelation. In the past Revelation was used to bolster strange beliefs, and thus was misused. This tendency is reappearing now because the world is troubled and afraid. We must, however, give heed to-day to another trend only slightly less unfortunate. It is the tendency to approach the Apocalypse as a book of happy augury, a symbolic beacon-light and nothing more for a time of discouragement, disillusion, and despair, in order to find in it some heartening message of hope clothed in the lan-

guage of "pure poetry." Over against the older errors of fantastic exegesis stands the new error of superficiality. For Revelation is not pure poetry. It contains a wealth of dogma, explicit and implicit, which is the sober prose of spiritual reality. It is doctrine rather than the seven-fold structure which literary criticism so delightedly discovers; it is theological principles rather than a dramatic dawn after a night of sorrows, which make the book vertebrate and make the hope of morning valid. Poesy and promise are the flowers, the brooks and the wind-thrummed pines on the mountainside. The contours and the everlastingness of the book, like those of the mountain, are determined and secured by the underlying granite.

There is a doctrine of sin and punishment; of remission and redemption.

There is a doctrine of faith. "Thou hast not denied my faith." "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

There is a doctrine of works. Not observances of the Mosaic Law, but inward character issuing in Christlike attitudes and acts, the "love, faith, service, and endurance" of the church in Ephesus. Faith without works is emptiness and hypocrisy. Works without faith will not avail. By the might of the Lamb men may overcome, but men must fight beside the Lamb; they must be "called, chosen, and faithful."

There is a doctrine of God, and if at first glance his portrait is that of an ultra-Barthian Deity, rigid and severe, it must not be forgotten that he is mentioned four times as the Father of Christ; that he is the Father of all who conquer; and that, at the end, he will dwell

with men and be their God, and will wipe away all tears from their eyes.

There is a doctrine of Christ. The Christology of Revelation is the richest in the New Testament, not excluding the writings of Saint Paul. He is the historical Christ, given repeatedly the personal name "Jesus." He is the "Root of David," the "Lion of the tribe of Judah." He is the exalted Christ, his exaltation being stressed as nowhere else—"King of kings and Lord of lords." He is the unique Son, pre-existent, very God of very God. He is a High Priest, "clothed with a garment down to the feet," but above all he is the Lamb—the designation occurring twenty-eight times—who wars against evil and overcomes it, the ultimate victory being won by his sacrificial death. He is Messiah, suffering and triumphant. He conquers sin, the selfish, through selfless, voluntary immolation, by a principle old as the foundation of the world. Standing in the midst of the throne of God, he reveals the Father's heart and will in world history, proclaiming that self-sacrificing, redemptive love is the intrinsic essence and meaning of the Godhead.

Finally, there is a doctrine of the last things. If this has certain elements which are confused and obscure, there are certain other elements clear as the sun in which John's angel stood. Character developed in this life carries surely over into the life to come. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: . . . their works do follow them." While for the redeemed, and for them alone, a world awaits where death lies dead, swallowed up in victory, a world whence all sorrow, all crying, and all pain are fled away from unendurable Light into the blackness of darkness forever.

He who would preach the Apocalypse will fail to declare the whole counsel of God if he neglect doctrine for poetry or form, or dwell exclusively upon the blessed hope of final triumph, without due regard to those eternal verities which undergird the hope.

There remains to be considered, in this introduction, only the question of John's eschatological expectation. It is a question which must be faced honestly, and not quietly ignored as in so many commentaries. John awaited the early return of Christ, the erection of the divine commonwealth, and the immanent deliverance of the church from her fiery trials. Over and over this clear expectation and definite promise appears. It opens the book in chapter one, verse one: "Things which must shortly come to pass." It closes the book, chapter twenty-two, verse twenty: "Surely I come quickly." In prologue and epilogue, and in numerous places between, the thought is plain. It is of the very essence of the book. Yet Christ delays his coming, the divine society stands not upon the earth. As for the immediate deliverance promised to the saints, the Roman persecutions continued for two hundred years after the book was ended. John shared with other apostles the hope of things which simply did not come to pass at the expected time. What is to be said of these obvious, undeniable facts?

We must remember that the language of the book, in general, is at the farthest possible remove from that which is literal and factual. It is the work of a poetic rather than a purely predictive prophet. Anyone reading poetry as literal fact is bound to end in confusion. In the larger sense, and in the larger sense only, these predictions are true. If there be any validity in our

Christian philosophy the Great Society must some day appear. Though persecuting Rome was not destroyed after the fashion of chapter eighteen, nevertheless she fell, fell under the wrath of that God who moves subtly in the long reaches of human history. And though Christ has not yet returned, his own promise of that return has not been proved false. Checking John's rhapsodic impetuosity by the sober facts, he appears mistaken. Before the God in whose sight one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, he is divinely right.

In this connection the words of R. H. Charles are in point.

"No great prophecy receives its full and final fulfillment in any single event or series of events. In fact, it may not be fulfilled at all in regard to the object against which it was primarily delivered by the prophet or seer. But, if it is the expression of a great moral or spiritual truth, it will of a surety be fulfilled at sundry times and in divers manners and in varying degrees of completeness in the history of the world." [1]

These preliminary considerations will help us as we go forward in search of our preaching values. They make for a kind of general understanding without which the student is hopelessly at sea.

Given an imagination like John's; a love for good and a hatred for evil like his; and given his purpose in writing, small wonder it is that we have a terrible, awesome, cataclysmic, divinely beautiful work in the Apocalypse, a book wherein earth and sea, and heaven and hell unroll before us; where Satan and the powers of eternal

[1] *International Illustrated Commentary.* Reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons, publishers.

righteousness clash in combat on a field of blood and smoke in which literal meanings give place to the cryptic and the hidden, and the poetry of everlasting truth reverberates only for those who are able to discern and receive it. Well John knows that his writing will be obscure. And that is why he says so often, sternly, but withal wistfully, "He that hath an ear let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches."

NOTE.—Doctor Wishart, in *The Book of Day,* stresses the idea that the cryptic nature of Revelation is due to the desire of the author to avoid direct statement which might lead to persecution and death. "Most people who complain that the Revelation is obscure, fail to realize that there was a reason, and a very definite reason, for its cryptic character, . . because the personal safety and very life of the writer and the readers of his message would not have been worth a farthing if its real meaning were made clear" (p. 5).

## Chapter I

# ON READING REVELATION ALOUD

THE reason so much modern poetry is harsh, dissonant, and juiceless is that it lacks emotion and, therefore, is not poetry at all. Emotion is the prime cause, the essential element of all poetry worthy of the name. If one has become so blasé, so embittered, so discouraged with life that no great and generous enthusiasms are possible, one cannot produce poetry. If there be no God in a man's cosmos; if, indeed, he has no certainty that there is a cosmos; if he believes that all human interests and hungers stem from sex; if the words Bethlehem and Golgotha, Judea and Galilee, hold no thrill; if his idealism is dead or as yet unborn, he has no materials with which to work. It is only when he is filled with a sense of something breathlessly greater than himself; of things literally too beautiful for words; of mysteries which no logic can penetrate—in short, it is only in those moments when he is cathedral-souled—that he is capable of practicing that spacious, indefinable, and lovely art which entitled him to the distinguished name of Poet. Only such a writer is "ποιητες," maker. All others are waiting to be made. "I think that to transfuse emotion—not to transmit thought, but to set up in the reader's sense a vibration corresponding to what was felt by the writer—is the peculiar function of poetry," says A. E. Housman. "A living poem," writes Edwin Arlington Robinson, "begins with a lump in the throat. . . . It is a reaching out

toward expression, an effort to find fulfillment. A complete poem is one where an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words." Ezra Pound declares: "Poetry is not greatly concerned with what a man thinks, but with what is so embedded in his nature that it never occurs to him to question it; not a matter of which idea he holds, but the depth at which he holds it."

There are times when the aim of the author of Revelation is not so much to "transmit thought" as to "transfuse" to the congregations, who shall hear his words read, the "vibrations" of his martyr-spirit and his passionate faith in the final triumph of righteousness; times when his turbulent, racing thought must find expression at whatever cost of fracture to the strict conventions of Greek rhetoric. And always what he has to say comes, not from the surface of the mind, but welling from profound deeps of conviction below all deliberate logic. That such emotion should find its way into rhythm is but natural. It is inevitable. We might have known, knowing something of John and something of his theme, that his Apocalypse would consist largely of noble verse.

One only realizes what a true poet John is when he discovers the stanza-structure of much of the book. All but four of its twenty-two chapters sound a rhythmic beat. We find, now brief songs, now a long passage cast in verse form.

Note some examples. The first two verses of chapter one announce plain facts—the revelation which God gave to Jesus is to be given by Jesus to John, who will bear witness concerning the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. This is direct statement, sober

prose. But verse three is the first of the seven benedictions of the book. An element of emotion, a fervency as of prayer steals into the language:

"Blessed is he that readeth,
And they that hear the words of the prophecy,
And keep the things which are written therein:
For the time is at hand."

The brief, "blameless" letter to the Philadelphians (3. 7-13) has a fresh literary power when we read it thus: "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,

"These things saith he that is holy,
He that is true,
He that hath the key of David,
He that openeth and no man shutteth,
And shutteth and no man openeth.
I know thy works.

"Behold I have set before thee an open door,
And no man can shut it.
For thou hast a little strength,
And hast kept my word,
And hast not denied my name.

"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan,
Which say they are Jews, and are not but do lie;
Behold, I will make them to come
And worship before thy feet,
And to know that I have loved thee.

"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience,
I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation,
Which shall come upon all the world,
To try them that dwell upon the earth.

"Behold I come quickly;
Hold that fast which thou hast,
That no man take thy crown.

"Him that overcometh
Will I make a pillar in the temple of my God,
And he shall go no more out:
And I will write upon him the name of my God:
And the name of the city of my God:
Which is new Jerusalem,
Which cometh down out of heaven from my God:
And I will write upon him my new name.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear
What the Spirit saith unto the churches."

There is a keener, more devastating thrust in the judgment of the Laodicean church (3. 14-16) when our mental arrangement of the lines is as follows:

"These things saith the Amen,
The faithful and true witness,
The beginning of the creation of God:

"I know thy works,
That thou art neither cold nor hot:
I would thou wert cold or hot.

"So then because thou art lukewarm,
And neither cold nor hot,
I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Chapter five contains three songs. The first begins with verse nine.

"And they sung a new song, saying,
Thou art worthy to take the book,
And to open the seals thereof:
For thou wast slain:

"And hast redeemed us to God by thy blood
Out of every kindred and tongue and people, and
nation;
And hast made us unto our God kings and priests:
And we shall reign upon the earth."

Verse eleven reverts to prose which continues through the first clause of verse twelve. Then ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of angels lift their chorus, crying with a loud voice:

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain
To receive power, and riches, and wisdom,
And strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

The first part of verse thirteen is again prose, leading to a grand finale in which all creation joins, and since chapters four and five deal with the power and majesty of God the Father, and God the Son, respectively, this song is the fitting close for the whole passage. It is no place for prose, but for impressive rhythm:

"Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power,
Be unto him that sitteth upon the throne,
And unto the Lamb forever and ever."

Note a few of the stanza-forms of chapter nine, nearly all of which falls into three and four-line strophes.

"And it was commanded them that they should not
hurt the grass of the earth,
Neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only
those men
Which have not the seal of God in their foreheads"
(verse 4).

"And in those days shall men seek death,
And shall not find it;
And shall desire to die,
And death shall flee from them" (verse 6).

"And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of
iron;
And the sound of their wings was as the sound of
chariots
Of many horses running to battle" (verse 9).

The minister who appreciates the beauty and impressiveness of fine literature, read aloud in adequate fashion, will find his opportunity in chapter eighteen, where John foretells the doom of Rome:

"Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen,
And is become the habitation of devils,
And the hold of every foul spirit,
And a cage of every unclean and hateful bird"
(verse 2).

"Come out of her my people,
That ye be not partakers of her sins,
And that ye receive not of her plagues" (verse 4).

For her sins have reached unto heaven,
And God hath remembered her iniquities" (verse 5).

"Reward her even as she rewarded you,
And double unto her double according to her works:
In the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double"
(verse 6).

"How much she hath glorified herself and lived deliciously,
So much torment and sorrow give her:
For she saith in her heart,
I sit a queen,
And am no widow,
And shall see no sorrow" (verse 7).

"And the fruits that thy soul lusted after
Are departed from thee,
And all things which were dainty and goodly
Are departed from thee;
And thou shalt find them no more at all" (verse 14).

"And the voice of harpers, and musicians,
And of pipers, and trumpeters,
Shall be heard no more at all in thee;
And no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be,
Shall be found any more in thee;
And the sound of a millstone
Shall be heard no more at all in thee;
And the light of a candle
Shall shine no more at all in thee;
And the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride
Shall be heard no more at all in thee;

"For thy merchants were the great men of the earth;
For by thy sorceries were all nations deceived;

And in her was found the blood of prophets and of
saints;
And of all that were slain upon the earth"
(verses 22, 23, 24).

Surely there is an added tenderness, a surer consolation in chapter twenty-one, verses three and four; and in chapter twenty-two, verses three to five, when we visualize or hear them in this way:

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men,
And he will dwell with them,
And they shall be his people,
And God himself shall be with them,
And be their God.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;
And there shall be no more death,
Neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any
more pain:
For the former things are passed away."

"But the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it;
And his servants shall serve him;
And they shall see his face;
And his name shall be in their foreheads.

"And there shall be no night there;
And they need no candle, neither light of the sun;
For the Lord God giveth them light;
And they shall reign forever and ever."

The preacher who would read Revelation well must be instinctively conscious of this rhythmic structure. Always, when an exposition is finished, except perhaps

in the case of those fantastically horrendous parts which can give the hearer little profit and less pleasure, the passage should be read unbroken by any comment, the reader entering, to some extent at least, into the emotional experience of the writer. Then, if he has come to a clear understanding of the meaning of the verses—this is most important, for otherwise he is in danger of falling into sing-song—he cannot fail of effective expression. The phrases, the words, even the syllables will be given their true emphasis and value. Then, even though his exposition may not have been altogether lucid, as may sometimes be the case; and even though the sermon fall short of a pulpit masterpiece, as may occasionally occur, the minister has given his people the rare benediction of great, sacred literature read with feeling and intelligence. For that his congregation will rise up and call him blessed. From that they will go out with a new sense of the immortal dignity of Holy Writ.

Someone has spoken of "the great gray language of the Bible." It is an apt description of much of Bible narrative. It is inept and out of place in connection with Psalmody and Apocalyptic. John's language smolders, then burns, then flames. Unless something of this fire can be communicated to his hearers as he reads, let not the parson attempt Revelation. Let him hold his peace. For to read it stolidly, prosily, is a kind of stodgy blasphemy which might, justly enough, subject him to some of the judgments of the book! For, if one remembers correctly, there is somewhere a firm statement to the effect that if any man shall *take away* from the words of the book he shall in no wise escape the penalty of his wrongdoing!

## Chapter II

# TITLE; SALUTATION; ASSURANCE

### Revelation 1. 1-8

IN verses one to three we have a preface; in verses four to eight a saluation. Both prepare us for what is to follow by impressing upon us the supreme import of the Revelation; and by giving assurance of the ultimate triumph of Christ and his church.

Verse 1. The Revelation is to be an unveiling. Not a revelation of what Christ is, but the revelation which Christ gives to the church, even as God has given it to him. As in the Gospel of John, God is the fountain and origin of all blessing. But all that he has he gives to the Son, the Son, in turn, sharing it with his disciples in so far as they are able to receive it. "Even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." This revelation will show things which "must" come to pass because it is the will of the Omnipotent One. These things are "signified" by the signs and wonders, the visions and the strange imagery, which John will record.

Verse 2. John "bare record." He witnessed. As an individual he is not important, but as a witness he is the servant of the Most High.

Verse 3. If the revelation is from Christ; if it has been so faithfully recorded; it follows that those who read and "keep," that is, treasure it in the heart, are "blessed." And whatever interpretation the early church put upon the words, "for the time is at hand,"

they are forever true. They have never ceased to be fulfilled. "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Verse 4. Here begins the salutation. After the manner of the Old-Testament prophets John records his name, and brings himself for the moment into the foreground. He is thus bold both because of his divine commission and because he is convinced of his own fidelity. He salutes "the seven churches," seven being the number which denotes completeness and includes all churches everywhere. The benediction which he gives proceeds not from himself alone, but from Him "which is, and which was, and which is to come." This description refers to God the Father and is a variant of "I AM THAT I AM." Compare Exodus 3. 14; John 8. 58; Colossians 1. 17. "And from the seven spirits," that is, the Holy Spirit in his completeness. And

Verse 5. From Jesus Christ. Thus we have a threefold benediction from Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Son is not only a faithful witness, because of the inherent truth of his nature; he is the resurrected Christ, Ruler over the princes of the earth, who shall dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel. Always in Revelation "earth" signifies the world as alienated from God. Kings and princes are its potentates, but Christ is King over them all. "Unto him that loved [Revised Version, "loveth"] us, and washed [Revised Version, "loosed"] us from our sins in his own blood." Here we have the writer's revelation of himself as a Jew who had become a Christian. The first half of the verse shows the Jewish expectation of Messiah at its noblest. The

second half shows this carried over into a Christian experience. This verse, the second half of which carries the thought over into verse six, gives the true relation between the old Jewish and the new Christian church. "Intellectually he [John] is still to a large extent a Jew, yet he is spiritually and ethically a true disciple of Christ, and possessed of his Spirit. He still clings to all that is valuable in the Old Testament, . . . but that which is specifically Christian is at the same time held by him with a glow of conviction and a passionate gladness." (C. A. Scott.)

Verse 6. "Kings"; that is, kingdom. An organized society. "Priests," having access to the holy of holies through the blood of Christ, to plead for one another, to minister to one another, to intercede for the world, and to set forth before those less favored the glory of God and his gospel. To the great Redeemer of verses 5 and 6 we may well ascribe "glory and dominion forever and ever."

Verse 7. "Cometh with clouds." Not merely the clouds of the sky, but clouds such as those of Sinai, of Shekinah, of the transfiguration and the ascension—clouds as the recognized signs of Deity.

"Every eye"; that is, all peoples, of all nations, living and dead. "And they also which pierced him." (Only John's Gospel mentions the pierced side.) "Tribes of the earth"; that is, peoples opposed to him. The whole verse refers to the ungodly.

Verse 8. "Alpha and Omega," etc., applies here to God the Father. But later in the book the same words are used of Christ, being thus an assertion of Christ's full Deity. . . .

Thus, as remarked above, preface and salutation pre-

pare us for what is to follow by impressing us with the import of the revelation, and by assuring us of Christ's final triumph.

### SERMON OUTLINE

Theme: *The Love of Christ*

In these eight verses are great riches. But if we are to choose the one idea which stands pre-eminent, it must be the Love of Christ. We are familiar with the thought in the Gospels. It glows on every page. It is set forth there in terms of his affection and tenderness for individuals. He was kind to Samaritans when his people hated them. He had a quick and sympathetic ear for those in distress. He loved little children. He sympathized with widows, pitied the lonely, loved the poor, healed the sick. He took thought for his mother's welfare in the midst of his bitterest pain. He freely forgave those who slew him. And even yet his cry over unrepentant Jerusalem rings agonized across the years.

With all this we are familiar through our reading of the Gospels. But in these verses the love of Christ transcends individuals and groups. It becomes universal. Its sweep is the sweep of eternity and the universe. Within the brief compass of eight verses it is set forth in five aspects.

1. He gave a revelation of himself and of the future to comfort a church in dire extremity. Like a mother calling through her door to a frightened child in the night.

2. He bore witness. As he declared in John 18. 37: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth,"

so here is fresh witnessing to eternal truth, for the church's sake.

3. He rose from the dead. "First begotten of the dead." If we would know the significance of this we need only listen to the anthems of the Easter joy, and the assurance which clangs like a trumpet among all the tombs of all the graveyards of the world: "I am the resurrection and the life," etc.

4. He "loved us and loosed us from our sins." This is the central meaning of the Bible; of all the churches and cathedrals and sermons and anthems and hymns of the Christian era.

5. He gives us the great assurance that he will prevail, in the end, over all the sorrow, pain, injustice, and evil of this world. "I am . . . the Almighty." What greater evidence of his love than this, the assurance that Love is omnipotent, stronger than death, stronger than hell, strong enough to conquer all that hates and opposes it finally and eternally. . . . Verily he is the incarnation of perfect love, the Alpha and Omega of all meaning for history; for our individual lives; for the destiny of mankind.

"Yea, through life, death, through sorrow and through sinning
He shall suffice me for he hath sufficed;
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ."

## Chapter III

# JOHN'S ORDINATION VISION

### Revelation 1. 9-20

IN these verses John tells of the first vision of the Son of man. "I John," he says, ". . . your brother, and companion [R. V., "partaker"] in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." Thus he emphasizes his close relation with those who shall read his writings, or hear them read in gatherings of Christians, and takes them into his confidence. He and his audience are spiritually one in Christ. The first part of the verse mingles three echoes from the Gospels: "In the world ye shall have tribulation"; "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"; "In your patience ye shall win your souls." "Patmos" is a rocky island of the Aegean Sea which is about ten miles long by five or six wide. Pliny mentions it as a place where prisoners of rank were banished. "For the word," etc. There are three interpretations: "*Because* preached; *in order to* preach there; in order to *receive visions* there. The second is highly improbable, the third only a little less so, the first the most satisfactory.

Verse 10. "In the spirit"; that is, in a state of prophetic ecstasy or trance. "The Lord's Day." The first instance in the New Testament of the use of this term. Among the Romans the first day of the month was "Imperial Day." Perhaps the writer gives an allusive contrast. "Voice," of Christ.

Verse 11. "Write." Not at the instant but after the

vision passes, the ecstasy ended. "Unto the seven churches," etc. These churches were on important consular routes, would serve as the best centers for the distribution of the message, and were representative by reason of their size and importance.

Verse 12. "Candlesticks"; that is, lampstands. An allusion to the seven-branched candlesticks of Exodus 25. 31. A natural symbol of the churches. "Ye are the light of the world." Compare also Philippians 2. 15.

Verse 13. "In the midst . . . Son of man." Taken from Daniel 7. 13. Thus the Old Testament sometimes describes God; or an angelic being. The writer here combines and modifies Old-Testament expressions. The length of the robe, and the golden girdle worn high suggest the dignity of the high priests.

Verse 14. "His head and his hairs." Literally, "His head, that is, his hair." This description is taken from Daniel 7. 9, where the Ancient of Days is described. His flaming eyes denote his fierceness toward his enemies.

Verse 15. "Fine"; that is, refined, having passed through many fires and been purified. "Many waters." Above (verse 10) the voice is described as trumpetlike. The trumpet simile is natural for an *announcing* voice; but the voice which will speak its messages through the next two chapters will be as "many waters," will be deep, awe-inspiring, like some Niagara, or like great billows breaking on the rocky shores of Patmos.

Verse 16. The seven stars are the seven churches. Seven, being the number of completion, includes all. "In hand"; that is, he holds the church fast in firm power and guides her destiny. Christ among the lampstands, with the churches in his hands signifies his abiding presence amidst, and his abiding power in sustain-

ing, the church for which he died. "A two-edged sword." Here two figures combine; Christ as a warrior going forth against his enemies, and their annihilation by his word or sentence of judgment. "Sun . . . strength"; that is, undimmed by cloud or mist. The entire description, as in the corresponding passages of Daniel and Ezekiel, is one of overwhelming power and glory. Here, as there, the seer prostrates himself, and, as in Daniel, receives a gracious uplifting touch.

Verse 17. "Laid his right hand," etc. How can this be when his hand is already full of stars? But strange things happen in dreams! "First and last." Referring to God the Father in verse 8; here to Christ the Son. The same title; the same fullness of Deity.

Verse 19. "Write," etc. This refers to the contents of the entire book. "Write of local, present conditions; of great concepts which have no time element; and of certain future events." So understood the command gives us another important key to the meaning of the book.

Verse 20. "Mystery"; that is, the hiddenness. "The angel." In Revelation everything has its angel. We read of the "angel of the waters" in 16. 5; the "angel of the winds" in 7. 1; "fire" in 14. 18; "abyss" in 9. 11. In the case of the churches the "angel" is the churches themselves as active, not passive, their inherent powers in actual operation upon the world without.

### SERMON OUTLINE

Theme: *The Living Christ*

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and . . . am alive forevermore" (Revelation 1. 18).

In the foregoing chapter we found our theme to be

"The Love of Christ." In this chapter it is "the Living Christ." John is an old man, in his eighties or nineties, when he writes his Revelation. He is compelled to look ahead, for soon he must face the ultimate mystery. But he also looks back. Like all old men, he cannot resist looking back. He is wise enough to know that he cannot understand the past without looking to the future, nor the future without looking to the past. Sixty years before he had wandered and toiled round about the Sea of Galilee. Then the great happening! The word of Christ took possession of him and he followed the gleam until it led him to the hour in which he lay upon his Master's breast, until he beheld Gethsemane and Golgotha; the Resurrection and Ascension. All through the years which followed these mighty experiences he looked back in order that he might intelligently look before. He turned back to what was, in order that he might reach up to what was to be. And lo! He found that the issue would be greater than his utmost expectation. The old man found a meaning in Christ that the young man had never discerned. For age is greater than youth. The glory of youth is the promise which lies in it. The glory of age is youth's promise ripened and fulfilled. In the text lie both John's precious memories and his golden hopes.

1. He looks back to a Christ who actually *was*. "I am he that liveth, and was dead." We know that there was such a man as Jesus. His career is attested by competent witnesses; his influence on history gives the lie to those who consider him a myth. He has done more for the race than anyone who has lived. The things we prize most in our civilization sprang from him. We unconsciously appraise the value of every institution by

its consonance with the mind of Christ. He came and raised a new society out of the wreck of the old. And the wonder of that achievement lies in the fact that his method went in the face of human nature. It is true that he recognized and gave effect to certain deep intuitions of the human heart, but meeting many wholly natural tastes and prejudices he went squarely in the teeth of them. His accomplishment is the measure of his personality. It is to that personality that John, all his life, looks back, saying with Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

2. John looked at the Christ who *is*. Christ was to him the Everliving One. Like the other members of the apostolic band he never believed that Jesus lay sleeping in a garden grave under the Syrian stars. They had beheld an empty tomb. They had seen Christ after his resurrection. It was their belief in a living Christ which alone gave to them the impulse to carry on. They were but a little band and the hostile pagan millions of the world were about them. They were a tiny island, and the ocean of the world's enmity beat upon them, but they clung to the belief that the living Christ would calm those seas. They were persecuted, but he was persecuted also, and was with them unto the end of the world. The philosophers might sneer at them, but the Lord Christ had said: "I am the Truth." Their road was over thorns and flints and hot plowshares, but Christ had trod that very way, and now that Figure, alive forevermore, went before them into every Galilee of life. Had they thought for a moment that he was dead, each man would have gone back to his farm, his vineyard, his shop, his fishing-boat, mourning a vanished dream, living as other men, dying

as other men. But they were led, upheld, encompassed by the Living One. They would bear faithful witness. And dying beneath the lictor's rods, or under the searing breath of the lions, or at the flaming stake, they could see One like unto the Son of man walking among the seven lampstands, holding fast within his living hand the seven churches and all their members; One who had lived as other men, who had tasted death for every man, and still lived. "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

3. John saw One who would be alive forevermore. He looked out upon a future in which he would soon face the Great Change. And he remembered. He remembered that into Christ's own life death had come. That spiritual existence which had been going on forever, and upon which the brief existences of men could now be strung as jewels on a golden cord, had come and had submitted itself to that which men had always been submitting to with fear. And behold! instead of being what men had feared it was—annihilation—it was only a changing of the circumstances of life, without power over the real principle of life. It was only a cloud obscuring for a moment the invincible sun. It was only one of the experiences of life, not an end of existence. Thus John's Saviour speaks to him: "Look at me. I am he that liveth and was dead, and am alive forevermore." "Because I live ye shall live also."

In the text lies a corrective for our unbalanced thinking. Here is a vision of the glorified Christ, but at the very center of it is the Christ of the sober Gospels who was both human and divine. The text says to us: In your thinking, hold the balance true between these two

phases of the Lord's personality. Let neither one escape from consciousness.

In every age, especially perhaps in our own, there is the tendency to magnify one aspect of Christ at the expense of the others. On the one hand, there is a type of mind which minimizes the importance of the gospel narratives; which passes over somewhat lightly the whole question of the integrity of the gospel story. What matter whether it be strictly true or not? It is the spiritual values that matter. On the other hand, there are those who never get beyond the history. The Christ they know is the Christ of Nazareth, the homeless wanderer in Judea, the sympathetic worker in town or village, the willing sufferer upon a green and lonely hill. The simple grandeur of his human life appeals to them, but beyond that they do not go. But there is something in the Christian faith far greater than that. It is living fellowship with the living and glorified Christ. The life resulting for the believer is more than an impression of the unquenchable love which shone throughout his earthly career and which the world will never allow to die. It is something more than a vague concept of the life of God become man. He who was on earth is in heaven, but he also fills the earth. His real presence has been at once a sword and healing oil, thrusting and pouring into every epoch of history, and into the heart of every Christian. Our text sets us in right relation to the human, the divine, the glorified, and the ever-present Christ. It delivers us from that dreamy belief which ignores the historicity of the Gospels, finds the seat of authority in religion wholly in our own breasts, and claims the sufficiency of intuition for spiritual certainty. On the other hand, it leads us

away from that mere backward-looking and unbuoyant faith which never escapes from earth and time; which never realizes and rejoices in the living Lord. Any intelligent Christianity must, of course, begin with the story of the Life. That is the very alphabet, and to master an alphabet is to gain a key. But the treasures of literature remain to be unlocked. It is not enough to know Jesus upon the hills of Galilee. We must behold him at the right hand of God the Father, and must feel him daily and hourly in the beating of our inmost hearts.

## Chapter IV

# THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES[1]

TO an age which knew no daily papers or monthly magazines, no telephone, wireless, or postal system, letters were of supreme importance, provided always that there was some way of transmitting them. It has often been pointed out that the Roman government, so farseeing and progressive in many ways, was strangely blind in that it failed to recognize the need of a regular postal system which would have enlightened and bound together the various parts of the vast Roman realm. Augustus, crowned in the year 27 B. C., had instituted an Imperial Messenger Service, but it was not available for private use, either commercial or personal. A rich man might send letters by the hand of a slave, but a person who had no slave must trust to chance for a courier. The whole affair, from the point of view of the average citizen, was as uncertain as the adventures of a man in our day who, owning no car, trusts to the interesting but wholly casual method of hitch-hiking.

The church knew instinctively that which the government never realized—that there must be constant intercourse between its widely scattered units. There must be unity of thought, a unity of action, a bearing of the burdens of the weak by the stronger. If some apostle or

[1] For much of the material in Chapters III to XI the author acknowledges his debt to Sir William M. Ramsay's *Letters to the Seven Churches* and his *Church in the Roman Empire.*

father wrote a letter to one church, it must be circulated, as far as possible, among them all. If one believer stood with heroic steadfastness against persecution, or met a martyr's death gazing into heaven, such inspiration must be relayed to every congregation, great or small. An interchurch commerce was essential to the very life of the whole body of disciples. Therefore the leaders of the church bent their energies to knitting together their widely sundered groups into a closely woven fabric which should effectively resist the heresies within and the persecutions from without which worked for their destruction.

In pursuance of this unifying purpose the leaders of the early church did two things. First, they developed letter-writing, under the guidance of the Spirit, to a high degree of perfection. What matchless storehouses of inspiration and instruction are the New Testament Epistles! The letters of Paul and Peter and John are arrows from the tense bowstrings of conviction speeding unerringly to their mark. And their target was never a single congregation. In its main features each Epistle was appropriate not only for the group which first received it but for every group then existing, and for all Christians throughout all time. The universality of these letters is one of their marvelous excellencies. Paul writes a letter to the Colossians, but toward the end he says, "When this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans." These churches were as widely different as two churches could well be, but both needed to hear the one voice, to receive the one divinely inspired message. Into these letters the apostles poured their wisdom, their hopes and fears, and their love, to the end

that the Church of Christ might stand faithful in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, holding a unity of spirit in the bond of peace.

Not only was letter-writing developed. The church made systematic use of all facilities available for transmission. The Roman government had failed dismally in the matter of the post office; but it had developed a remarkable travel system by means of splendid roads and bridges connecting with routes by sea. Wherever men travel letters may be carried. Over roads and bridges brooded the Roman peace. The way was guarded by Roman legionaries. Thus encouraged, correspondence flourished. It included a large portion of the New Testament. The children of light utilized the devices of the children of darkness to inform, hearten, and consolidate their scattered units.

And now to glance more closely at the Letters to the Seven Churches. The structural plan is essentially the same in each. *a.* "Unto the angel of the church in . . . write." *b.* "These things saith." *c.* Then follows a phrase descriptive of Christ. Concerning this descriptive phrase two things are to be noted. First, it has an especial appropriateness in connection with the circumstances, or the character of the church addressed. Second, each descriptive phrase is almost invariably a part of the description of Christ found in chapter one, verses twelve to sixteen. In other words, the description in chapter one is divided into seven parts, and one of these parts used at the beginning of each of the Seven Letters. *d.* "I know." *e.* Christ's praise, if any. *f.* Christ's blame, if any. (In four of the letters there is a mixture of praise and blame. One, Laodicea, receives only blame. Two, Smyrna and Philadelphia, receive

only praise.) *g.* Christ's counsel. This order is sometimes varied. In some cases "counsel" becomes warning or downright threat. All end with the words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

This also should be kept in mind. John surveys each church *together with* the city in which it is situated. Often he does not discriminate sharply between the two. And he considers the church-and-city from the point of view of one who believes that scenery and geographical surroundings exercise a strong influence on the character and destiny of a people. In 1857 Thomas Buckle published his memorable book on the *History of Civilization,* maintaining that all history had grown out of man's relation to his physical environment. Geography, climate, rainfall, trade routes, the possibilities of soil and mines and fisheries, explain all. Buckle's work has had a distinct influence upon theories of history and economics ever since its publication. The germ of that idea is prominent in the Seven Letters. John was too wise to believe that environment could account for everything in the life of a people. He was no materialist. But he doubtless did believe that the broad features of a landscape—the relation of sea and land, river and mountain—were elements in the determination of history; that through economic situations thus created, and through a subtle influence on thought and imagination, the minds of men were molded and their destiny foretold by their surroundings. This accounts for the fact that in the Letters the environment of the city in which the church is located is taken into account and emphasized, now openly in so many words, again by implication.

The seventh and last Letter probably ends with 3. 19. The series then closes with an exhortation not to a particular church, but to the individuals who compose the various congregations.

## Chapter V

# THE LETTER TO EPHESUS

### Revelation 2. 1-7.

THE city of Ephesus was for many years the greatest commercial center of Asia Minor. The name is suggestive of many things to every Bible student. We learn from the Acts that it contained the most famous of all the temples of Diana. The image of the goddess which was worshiped there was supposed to have been cast down from heaven by Jupiter. In Ephesus also was a temple, perhaps more than one, where the Roman emperor was worshiped. Because of its situation and importance the apostle Paul saw the city as a strategic point for missionary enterprise and lived there for two years and three months—a longer period of residence than any other of his ministry. To the church there he afterward wrote his immortal Epistle to the Ephesians. He tells us in one place that he "fought with beasts at Ephesus." He made his beloved Timothy bishop of Ephesus in order that the work which he, Paul, had begun might be carried on. There John lived for many years. Whether the book of Revelation was written in its entirety while the author was an exile on Patmos, where he beheld the visions, as Sir William Ramsay and others suppose, or whether the visions were recorded later, we cannot positively say, but if the writing was accomplished elsewhere, it was almost certainly in the city of Ephesus. Christians accused of disloyalty to the state would, for the most

part, pass through the port of Ephesus on their way to Rome for trial, and, because many of them would later suffer martyrdom in the Coliseum, Ignatius wrote to the church in Ephesus: "Ye are on the highroad of them that are on their way to die unto God." It is on account of these things doubtless that Ephesus is honored with the first of the Seven Letters.

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In verse one we have Christ's title. "These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." To the church that was perhaps the most representative of all, Christ says: "I am present in all the churches. All are in my hand to keep and to guide."

In verses two and three we find Christ's praise. It is a sevenfold commendation. "I know thy *works*." The church was a working church, not a clubhouse, not a dormitory. "I know thy *toil* and *patience*." It was a toil and patience devoted particularly to the overcoming of error; and a steadfast exercise in witnessing for Christ. Christ had foretold that "there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." To this church, situated on one of the great highways of the world, came many professing to be authentic Christian teachers. Ephesus had tested them, sifted them out. They had carefully determined which of these were worthy of confidence and which of them were liars. They had followed out this task to the point of weariness. Thou "hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted." They had carried on for Christ's sake. Their rejection of the false had brought them

trouble and persecution, but they had not wavered. High was the duty and arduous, but they had not failed.

Verse six is also a verse of praise. "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." The Nicolaitans were a sect, probably founded by a man named Nicolas, who held and taught two great heresies which had to be fought by the church for centuries. The first was Antinomianism. Since Christ had set men free from the law they might do as they pleased and Christ's atoning death would cover all. It was this false doctrine which raised the ire of Paul when he wrote to the Romans: "What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." It was this heresy, proclaimed by Anne Hutchinson, which vexed our forefathers in America until she was killed by the Indians in 1643 in what is now Westchester County. From Paul to Anne Hutchinson there has scarcely been a single decade which has not yielded examples of Antinomianism, and doubtless there are traces of it in many individual hearts even to this day.

The other heresy of the Nicolaitans was Gnosticism. The Gnostics believed that they had sounded the depths of all knowledge without necessary reference to the Scriptures, and that they alone possessed the truth. They held that God had sent a supernatural being to redeem the world, but that he was distinct from the historical Jesus. These, together with many other strange and fantastic errors, made up the teachings of the Gnostics. The Nicolaitans embraced the false doctrines of both Antinomians and Gnostics. For that Christ hated them. The church of Ephesus hated them. Therefore the church is commended. "Thou hast tried

them; thou canst not bear them; thou hast labored and hast not fainted." How proud any church might be of praise like that!

But He whose eyes are as a "flame of fire" could see that in spite of her virtues all was not well with the church of Ephesus, and in verse four we find Christ's blame. "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Perhaps this means that the spirit of brotherly love had departed, for in the breasts of heresy-hunters the milk of human kindness is prone to curdle. But the meaning of this dispraise goes farther. Their first love for Christ had gone stale. The morning freshness of its tender glory had departed. The two meanings are inseparable. No church can hold its love for the brethren when its love for Christ has weakened, and no church on fire with love for Christ will be wanting in holy fellowship among its members.

Think of the enthusiasm of first love. If we can remember when love first came to us we know it was like nothing else that had ever touched our lives. It stirred in us as spring stirs the earth when the first buds appear. We had new and limitless capacities for work, enjoyment, and suffering. Something very similar happens when a man is sincerely converted to Christ. It is a new experience. Spiritual things which were very far off and very vague are near and real. We feel within us a new passion—a new passion to do good, to sacrifice ourselves, to make some return for that divine love which surrounds us like an atmosphere and lifts us like an inspiration. It is easy to do right. To do wrong is all but unthinkable. We cannot be so disloyal as to contemplate any forbidden thing, and remorse falls

upon us if we stray even a little from the path of right. We realize life at its most abundant. We realize God in such fashion as we had never dreamed possible. We realize the claims of our fellow men, the beauty of goodness, the baseness of evil, the triumphant power of righteousness, and the wide, deep meanings of eternity. And we are eager to act in the light of these fresh accessions of knowledge and emotion. We are full of conviction and spiritual impulse. We must do something for the Christ who has made all things new, who has given us all things, above all himself. Such is the enthusiasm of first love for the Master.

But there are times when nothing of all this is discoverable in our experience. Sometimes a man looks back, cold as ice, and says: "Yes, I was rather interested in religion at one time. I was really quite enthusiastic about it. Curious how the mind works. I can scarcely credit it now. One of those passing phases of feeling I suppose." Sometimes a man looks back to scoff. "I believe I did make rather a fool of myself at one time about religion, but I have real things to look after now." And sometimes a man looks back wistfully, despairingly. "Yes, I know the experiences you speak of. Hopes bright beyond all telling, a dawnlight flooding all the world. But the light is gone, the tide has ebbed, and the tender grace of a day that is dead will never come back to me." Such is the loss of first love for Christ.

The Ephesian church was outwardly admirable. Zeal, orthodoxy, boldness, heroism were all there; but the love for Christ from which these virtues sprang was on the wane. This was the sin, the root-sin which threatened. There was little of worldly conformity, but

they had leaned too far in the other direction. They were beginning to be blighted with spiritual pride. All who differed with them were wrong. They were dogmatic and dictatorial, and before long they might become as fanatical in persecution as the Roman inquisitors themselves; and all this because first love for Christ has given place to pride of heart.

And now verse five brings to them Christ's counsel. "Remember." Let memory have its way with you; and there is no better specific for the restoration of first love, whether it be for one's wife, or husband, or for Christ. "Remember whence thou hast fallen"—the enormity of their decline. "And repent." Not merely regret, for "repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience." "Do the first works." Continue the work which has distinguished you, but in the former spirit, motivated by first love for Christ. "Or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place." Christ does not imply the destruction of the church, but that she must begin anew, build from the bottom up, recapture the first fine rapture of her experience in him.

In the last chapter it was pointed out that John always links together the church addressed and the city in which it is situated. Here is an instance of that practice. "The most marked characteristic of Ephesus was change," says Sir William Ramsay. "In most ancient sites one is struck by the immutability of nature and the mutability of all human additions to nature. In

Ephesus it is the shifting character of the natural conditions on which the city depends for prosperity that strikes every careful observer. . . . The scenery and the site have shifted from century to century. Where there was water there is now land. What was a populated city in one period ceased to be so in another, and has again become the center of life for the valley. Where at one time was only bare hillside or the gardens of a city some miles distant, at another there was a vast city, crowded with inhabitants, and this has again relapsed into its earlier conditions; the harbor in which Saint John and Saint Paul landed has become a mere marsh, and the theater where the excited men met and shouted to Diana, desolate and ruinous as it is, has been more permanent than the harbor. The relation of land and sea has changed in quite unusual fashion: the broad level valley was once a great inlet of the sea, at the head of which was the oldest Ephesus. . . . But the sea receded and the land emerged from it. The city followed the sea and changed from place to place to maintain its importance as the only harbor in the valley." All of this gives point to Christ's counsel, ending in a threat: "Unless you change your ways, there will be another upheaval. You will be removed out of your place. You will be forced to watch your glory depart until you are driven to make a new start."

Verse seven contains Christ's promise. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God." Trees played a great part in the religion of many Eastern peoples. They had been worshiped as the home of the divine spirit from time immemorial. When the sacred olive tree on the Acropolis at Athens put forth a new shoot,

after the city had been burned by the Persians, the people knew that the safety of the state was assured. The tree which grew on a grave was thought to be permeated with the life of the man buried beneath. An old Athenian law punished with death a man who cut down an oak in a cemetery. "The problem constantly present to the ancient mind was, how can the gulf which divides human nature from the divine be bridged over?" In a tree the divine life seemed to come closer to the human spirit. He who could eat of the fruit of a divine tree might feed on the divine power and nature. Thus the figure was crammed with meaning for the congregation to whom this letter was written. And its fuller and clearer meaning is in John's Gospel. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, . . . ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, . . . I will raise him up at the last day."

## Chapter VI

# THE LETTER TO SMYRNA

### Revelation 2. 8-11

SMYRNA—city of beauty! In the foreground the harbor sparkles, in the background the mountains lie sleeping in their purple shadows, while between the hill Pagos thrusts upward to a height of some four hundred fifty feet. Upon the slopes of this hill, and about its base clustered the buildings of the ancient town. The streets were broad and clean. There were many trees, fine gardens, spacious parks. In the market place there was traffic in articles of luxury and beauty; fruits and spices, oils and silks, carpets and rugs, whose soft, rich colorings enshrined the loveliness and mystery of the East. But from whatever angle one viewed the city one's eye swung back to the hill Pagos. It dominated everything. It was the center and focus of the city's life. An ancient writer has this hill in mind when he writes of Smyrna: "The grace which extends over every part like a rainbow, and strains the city like a lyre into tenseness harmonious with itself and with its beautiful surroundings, and the brightness which pervades every part and *reaches up to heaven,* like the glitter of the bronze armor in Homer." Perhaps Homer, blind singer of immortal songs, was influenced by the loveliness of his surroundings, for he was born and reared on the banks of a little stream named Meles which flowed near the outskirts of the town. The hill was the ultimate crown of the beauty of the place. It was familiarly

known as the Crown of Smyrna and was celebrated under that name in song and story.

Smyrna was also a city of sorrows, a place where unconquerable life emerged continually out of death. Its story is a fascinating romance, an endless tragedy, and the record of an exhaustless capacity for recovery. In the dawn of history it is a purely Asiatic city named for a woman-warrior, an Amazon called Smyrna. Centuries later the Greeks sail across the Ægean Sea and conquer it. Centuries pass, and now it is conquered by the Lydians, losing its place in the list of Greek towns for the next three hundred years, during which much of its characteristic culture is lost, together with its well-organized political system. Finally Greece returns in the person of Alexander the Great, who proposes to restore it as a Greek city-state, but his death intervenes and the work is not accomplished until the fourth century under a Roman protectorate. Again the centuries pass. The conquering Turk appears. Constantinople becomes the great city of the region while Smyrna declines. It is seized by a Turkish marauder in the year 1084, but is recovered by the Romans. Again and again it is ravaged by the Turk, but at length the Romans prevail and it is rebuilt in 1222. A Turk captures it again in 1330. Soon after, the Knights of Saint John, an army of crusaders, appear before the walls, occupy the town, but are unable to conquer the citadel on the heights of Pagos. In 1402 Tamburlane storms the city and massacres the greater part of the inhabitants. This mightiest of all warriors known to history, who makes the exploits of the Cæsars and Alexanders and Napoleons seem amateurish, builds an enormous pyramid out of the Smyrnæan heads

which he cuts off. When he conquered Bagdad his pyramid was built of 93,000 heads. How many he used in Smyrna we do not know, but this fact is preserved for us: not content with the height of the structure, he alternated the layers of heads with layers of mud—a simple expedient, but effective in producing an impressive result. Tamburlane's rule was but temporary, and the city has remained in Turkish hands with practically no interruption until the present day.

After the World War, Greece and Turkey contended for its possession. We remember our headlines in 1922, when the Greek refugees from all over Asia Minor evacuated Smyrna. We remember the brutal and horrible atrocities committed by both sides in the struggle which culminated, a few days after the Turks took possession, in 1923, in a fire which started in the Armenian quarter and destroyed more than three fifths of the town. Five years later it was shattered by a severe earthquake.

All this is matter of record, and the amazing thing is that through all these centuries, from the beginnings of its history, Smyrna has never lost its identity. Other cities to whom John's letters went have crumbled into dust and live merely as sheeted ghosts upon the fields of time. But Smyrna abides. To-day it is an important community of Asia Minor with a population of some two hundred thousand souls; a city of continuing sorrows but still immortal.

Smyrna was a city of religious persecutions. With all its war and tumults and hatreds it was inevitable that persecution should be severe and frequent. It was here that Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, met martyrdom in the year 155, a half century or more after the book of Reve-

lation was written. The mob howls for Polycarp's blood. The governor strives in every way to make him recant. If he will simply say: "Cæsar is Lord"; if he will but throw on the altar where the emperor is worshiped a few grains of incense; if he will revile Christ, he may escape. His reply is: "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he hath done me no wrong. How then can I speak evil of my King who saved me?" The multitude clamor that a lion be loosed upon him, but the governor refuses. They clamor that he be burned, and the governor yields. The Jews gather wood. Polycarp is tied to the stake, the fire is lighted. But it overarches him like a billowing sail. As he remains unharmed the executioner is ordered to plunge a dagger into his side. The Jews demand that the body be burned, but the Christians are allowed to bear away the half-calcined bones, which, says an ancient writer, "were more precious to them than gold or gems."

Smyrna was a faithful city. From the time that Roman power first made itself felt in the East, Smyrna and Rome were in alliance. Even when Rome's future fortunes were unpredictable Smyrna declared uncompromising allegiance. A hundred years later, when it became known that a certain Roman army was in dire distress, the citizens stripped off their clothing to send to the suffering soldiers. Cicero referred to Smyrna in one of his orations as the "city of our firm and most faithful allies." In many ways Rome showed its approval and appreciation of Smyrna, the city thereby gaining a name for loyalty and faithfulness.

Thus we find a city with a great hill known as the "Crown of Smyrna"; a city of survival after many deaths; a city where Jewish hate made use of Roman

power; a city of unwavering fidelity. Such was Smyrna. To keep these things in mind is to make plain the allusions in the letter to the Church of Smyrna.

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In verse eight we have Christ's title. "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive." How appropriate in addressing a church in a city which had refused to die! "I who measure time not by centuries or æons, I who behold the sweep of the eternities, I who saw and conquered death forever, it is I who speak to you, O suffering, persecuted, yet ever-living Smyrna."

Verse nine yields us Christ's praise. *"I* know thy *works."* "I know thy *tribulation"*—a word of drastic meaning used of the pressure on grapes in the wine-press; of flails in the threshing; of the grinding of grain. *"I* know thy *poverty."* Riches are all about you as the great city takes toll of the interior. I know how you are forgotten in the distribution of that wealth, but still I know that you are rich in the things of the spirit, for God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom. *"I* know the blasphemy (reviling against you) of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan."

Throughout the book of Revelation the Christian is the true Jew, for the Christian has embraced God's plan for the Jew. With John, as with Paul, Christians constitute the true "Israel of God." Every Jew who hated or persecuted a follower of Christ betrayed the Jewish faith. These persecutions were frequent and bitter, and it is not difficult to understand the frame of mind whence they sprang. Christians made converts from Judaism; they believed and taught that the Chris-

tian interpretation of the Old-Testament Scriptures was the only valid one; and that they were the true perpetuators of the Hebrew faith. Moreover, the Christians won to their cause Gentiles who had previously held a high opinion of Judaism and who were attendants at the Jewish synagogues. In these circumstances bitter enmity was inevitable as long as the Jews failed to see the new light.

There is no blame for Smyrna in the letter. Verse ten brings Christ's counsel. "Fear not those things which thou shalt suffer." Satan making use of Jews and Romans for his own purposes will throw you into prison perhaps, and you will know the bitter experience not only of imprisonment, but of trial, sentence, and possibly—nay, probably—execution. But be ye faithful; as faithful to me as your city has been to the Romans, and after the period of tribulation, you shall receive a crown of life, a thing more glorious than Pagos.

To the counsel of verse ten a promise is added in verse eleven: "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Of the second death we shall hear more in the later chapters. Suffice it to say here that the first death is the natural death, to which all men are subject. The second is the eternal death, to which, in John's conception, the sinner is given over at the Judgment. The Smyrnæans may die at the hands of their persecutors but, faithful to the last, the second death can have no power over them. It is an echo of Christ's word in Matthew 10. 28: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul."

If one elect to linger in the second of the Seven Letters the closing words of verse ten may well hold his attention. "Be thou faithful." Fidelity is a great vir-

tue because it is useful. The needle, forever faithful to the pole, is one of the most useful things in the world. Why it behaves as it does we do not altogether know. We say it has something to do with magnetism, but when we have said that we do not solve the mystery. This we know, that what magnetism is to the needle, faithfulness is to the subtle interplay of human relationships. It makes men honest and true and therefore dependably useful.

Fidelity is beautiful. The sun rises and sets in floods of golden glory; the moon and stars move through the dark heavens in brightness; and we say they are beautiful. But sometimes we forget that they calm and enrapture us largely because they move in a faithful rhythm. It is an integral part of their loveliness. They were there when the morning stars sang together. They will be there until heaven and earth shall pass away. There are souls as faithful as the stars, and though they be obscure, though men are slow to see their beauty, there is One who accords to them the crown of life.

"Not once or twice in our rough island-story,
The path of duty was the way to glory:
He that walks it, only thirsting
For the right, and learns to deaden
Love of self, before his journey closes,
He shall find the stubborn thistle bursting
Into glossy purples, which outredden
All voluptuous garden-roses.
Not once or twice in our fair island-story,
The path of duty was the way to glory:
He, that ever following her commands,
On with toil of heart and knees and hands,
Thro' the long gorge to the far light has won
His path upward, and prevailed,

Shall find the toppling crags of Duty scaled
Are close upon the shining tablelands
To which our God himself is moon and sun."

And fidelity in this verse is beautiful because it carries with it a beautiful promise. It gives us the certainties of heaven. When we are young, we think little of heaven; we are inclined to scoff at a mythical realm upon which our elders seem to dwell so much. Grown older, we long for rest. We think little of paradise so long as life is satisfactory to us as individuals. Then love comes. Our life is bound up with another life. And then we say:

"A little way to walk with you my own—
Only a little way,
Then one of us must weep and walk alone
Until God's day.

"A little way! It is so sweet to live
Together, that I know
Life would not have one withered rose to give
If one of us should go.

"And if these lips should ever learn to smile,
With thy lips far from mine,
'Twould be for joy that in a little while
They would be kissed by thine."

No, this life would have "no withered rose to give." But "one" must inevitably "go." Then the mind moves out to see if it may discover a promise of immortality and reunion. And we know that if we are faithful unto death, we can say with indefectible conviction:

"There, nevermore shall be a searing sorrow,
Nor ever-wearing weariness of pain,
Nor losses unatoned of any gain,
Nor loneliness that longs a lighter morrow.

"For rose or rue that fadeth, fadeless asphodel—
No stumblingstones to scar our shining feet;
No bitter winter partings to repeat;
Alone! Upon the lifting trails of immortelle."

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

NOTE.—The way in which having "loved and lost," by death, inevitably creates a keen interest in immortality, even in the case of those who have previously denied all concern with the question, is brought out strikingly by Professor John Baillie, in his indispensable book, *And the Life Everlasting.* Compare p. 59, *et seq.*

## Chapter VII

# THE LETTER TO PERGAMOS

### Revelation 2. 12-17

THE ancient city of Pergamos was built upon and around a great hill of rock. The rock planted its feet in, and dominated, a wide far-stretching valley. From it, looking in one direction, mountains were to be seen, in another direction the sea. It was a site predestined for a royal city. Travelers approaching it felt an impression of authority and power.

And Pergamos was, in olden days, a city of authority. It was a great religious center. Here were shrines to Zeus, supreme deity of the Greeks; to Athena, goddess of wisdom and war and patroness of the arts; to Dionysos, god of wine, fruitfulness, and the drama, known to the Romans as Bacchus. It was the seat and center of an organized worship of Askelepios, or Æsculapius, god of healing. Æsculapius seems to have been originally a real character, a great physician about whom, after his death, strange legends sprang up, until he was deified and given his place in the pantheon. Zeus, fearing that he might make all men immortal, slew him with a thunderbolt. Temples in his honor were erected in many cities of the Greek world and in the Roman dominions, the chief of these being in Pergamos. Thousands of sick folk resorted to these shrines and miraculous cures were common. When one was cured, it was the custom to sacrifice a cock to the great healer. When Socrates was about to drink the hemlock in execution

of the sentence passed upon him, he charged his friends not to forget the rite. "Life is a fever. At death the fever is cured. Do not forget to sacrifice a cock to Æsculapius." About this worship there grew up a powerful cult who studied the origin of life, made drugs, philters and potions, fostered witchcraft and commerce with devils. These superstitions led to a debauchery of worship in which the god was revered in the form of a serpent, and the baser passions ruled supreme. Pergamos was noted for a great library, the second in the world, which Marc Antony removed to Egypt and presented to Cleopatra. But it is doubtful whether it contained much that was of value. It was probably consulted mainly by those who sought the lore of dreams and fortunes and the black art. Our word "parchment" is derived from "Pergamos," where the first good parchment was made. If great literature was recorded upon it, we have no knowledge of it; charms, magic, cabala—these were in all probability the base uses to which it was devoted.

In the city also were temples for the worship of the Roman emperor. Pergamos was indeed the foremost seat of the worship in the province, for here, for the first time in an Asian province, a temple was consecrated to the divine Cæsar in the year 29 A. D.

Pergamos was also a city of *political* authority. Its great central rock had worn the frown of autocratic dominance, under various governments, over an unbroken period of four hundred and fifty years at the time John wrote. In his eyes Pergamos was the place where Rome, enemy of the church, exercised both religious and political control. Because of the number of the false gods, especially Æsculapius; and because it

was the seat of the Roman government and the worship of the emperor, John says of it: "Where Satan's seat is." "Where Satan dwelleth."

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Christ's Title (verse 12). "He which hath the sharp sword with two edges." The sword was the symbol of supreme temporal power. Christ says in effect: "Think you it is the Roman government which has the power of life and death? It is I who wield that power, while you and the world imagine it is wielded by the proconsul."

Christ's Praise (verse 13). "I know thy works. I realize that you dwell in one of Satan's very strongholds, where the worship of the emperor may be evaded only upon pain of death. I know that where you live it is desperately difficult to maintain a Christian life. But in spite of all this you have held fast my name, you have not denied your faith in me, even when Antipas, one of your number, was slain as a martyr, there at Satan's throne, where Satan dwelleth."

Christ's Blame (verse 14, 15). "Them that hold the doctrine of Balaam." To understand the allusion we must go back to an old story in the book of Numbers. Balaam was a prophet of Jehovah. Balak was king of the heathen tribe of Moab. Balak sent to Balaam and offered a huge sum of money if he would curse the Israelites so that Balak might more easily destroy them in battle. Balaam replied that he could not come without the consent of Jehovah, which had been refused. Balak had sent the elders of the tribe in the first instance, but now, as his request is repeated, he sends more honorable messengers, even princes. Balaam replies that not for a house full of gold and silver would he go beyond the word of Jehovah. But this time

Jehovah gives permission, provided Balaam will speak only the words put into his mouth. He is met by Balak. Sacrifice is offered on the top of a convenient hill, and then—Balaam blesses the people whom he had been invited to curse! Balak is disappointed, but decides that Balaam, looking upon all Israel from the hill of sacrifice, had found them too imposing. Let him go to a height where he can see only the outlying parts of the camp and the result may be different. But the result is the same. A third attempt is made, but again the result is the same, blessing instead of cursing, and the blessing ends with a prophecy of the defeat of Moab. Balak is enraged at what he considers Balaam's treachery and dismisses him without the honors and emoluments which by this time Balaam is keenly coveting. So he offers Balak some vile but very clever advice. "If you can seduce Israel to false worship, or into dissolute practices with the women of Baal, Jehovah himself will curse them." This counsel is taken. The Israelites are led into sin, the Moabites defeat them with heavy slaughter, and one reads, not without a certain satisfaction, that Balaam himself was slain in the fray. "So," says Christ, "you have there in your church some who make religiousness a cloak for their sin. Balaamites, Nicolaitans, who think, because they are free of the law, they can stretch my grace to cover every abomination."

Christ's Counsel (verse 16). "Repent." Here we find the note of urgency which is so often present in the Old Testament. The children of Israel were surrounded by heathen tribes. Their very existence depended upon separation from these. This accounts for the drastic commands that every contact must be avoided at what-

ever cost; that the failure to obey the commands would bring the direst penalties. If it was necessary to destroy a heathen tribe in order to prevent the contamination of Israel, then let the tribe be exterminated. So here we find the same terrible urgency to separateness and purity. Surrounded by the evil worship of every cult known to Asia, Greece, and Rome, there could be no tolerance in the Church of Christ at Pergamos for those who dabbled in the worship of false gods. The precise action which Christ proposes we do not know. We have only the statement: "I will come. I will come in judgment. I will come in judgment and pronounce sentence, fighting against your erring members with the sword of my mouth."

Christ's Promise (verse 17). It is a twofold promise. First, "to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." We can only understand this in the light of the Old Testament, and in the light of later Jewish tradition. Aaron had been commanded to lay up a basket of manna before the ark. Later it became a tradition that before Jerusalem was destroyed, the ark with its contents and appurtenances, was removed by Jeremiah and hidden in a cave of Mount Sinai. That when Messiah should appear, these hidden things would be brought to light and restored to their place of honor. Here we find these old, traditional meanings mingled with the Christian revelation of Christ as the bread of life. Those who overcome shall eat forever of the true bread.

"I . . . will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." The words have always been difficult for the student of Revelation. To them have

been ascribed many meanings. Pebbles, often cut into little cubes, served various purposes in the ancient world, especially in voting and counting. Sometimes the stone was thought of as a symbol of victory. In the Roman amphitheater the games are in progress. The seats rise, tier upon tier, crowded with excited spectators. Sweet perfumes drip through the canopy which shelters the nobility from the burning sun. Clouds of dust rise from the chariot wheels and the feet of those who run. There is a mighty shout as a man who has won the race, or slain the lion, or killed the gladiator, steps forth to receive the crown of laurel. With the crown goes something more practical. It is a white stone. The victor is now, on presentation of the stone, entitled to be fed at the public expense, and to be feted and honored wherever he goes. Thus the stone as a symbol of victory is one of the meanings ascribed to the reference in this verse.

But there are other meanings which John doubtless has in mind. The stone is white. Judges in the Greek courts cast black pebbles into a box for condemnation, white for acquittal. Those in Pergamos who were faithful would be acquitted at God's judgment bar. And the "new name"? Often in the Bible and in secular writing it stands for a new character. When a great moral change came to Jacob, his name was changed. Before it had been "Supplanter"; henceforth it is "Prince with God." Peter's name was originally Simon. Jesus changed it to "Rock." When Scipio won a great campaign in Africa, he became "Scipio Africanus." These converts in Pergamos who were faithful would be changed in character to a point where they would merit a new name and would receive it; a divine name,

perhaps the name of Christ, they being called "Christian."

It is probable there is a hidden allusion here. Those who read the letter first would be struck by the analogy between the "new name" and the imperial title "Augustus." Before the day of Augustus the name was used only by priests, and was never applied to men, even though they were potentates. But in the year 27 B. C. the name had been appropriated and applied to an emperor when, for the first time, a Roman ruler had been worshiped as God. And Christ declares, "All those humble ones who are faithful and who overcome are raised even higher than Augustus, having a new name, the name of God." Such was the answer which the church made, through her Master, to the persecuting monarch who, beyond all his predecessors, prided himself upon his divine nature expressed in his divine name; an answer returned in that very city where his imperial religion had placed its capital and its throne.

But there is secrecy surrounding the name. "A name . . . which no man knoweth. . . ." Why? Often in those old days the white stone was a talisman, giving the wearer safety in danger, and power over difficulties. He was secretive about this talisman, for, if its nature were to become known, his enemies or the spirits of evil might prevail against him. And when the stone was used in still another manner, secrecy was advisable. Here were two friends. They were about to separate. A white stone was engraven with their names. It was then broken in two, each man took half, and they went their diverging ways. These two men might never meet again, but the tokens were handed down from father to son. The sons, or grandsons, or great grandsons

might some day find each other. Then the two halves of the stone fitting together would constitute a sacred bond. Plautus refers to this custom in one of his plays. Hanno inquires of a stranger where he may find Agorastocles. The stranger says, "I am he." "If so," responds Hanno, "compare if you please this hospitable stone." "It is the exact counterpart," says Agorastocles, "I have the other part at home." Whereupon Hanno responds: "O my friend, I rejoice to meet thee; thy father was my friend, my guest. I divided the stone with him." "Therefore," said Agorastocles, "Thou shalt have a home with me, for I reverence hospitality."

And so, summing up the symbolism of the stone, the new name, and the secrecy attached to it, this is what Christ says to the faithful in the church in Pergamos: "I give you the white stone of victory over sin, of deliverance from judgment. I give you a new name in token of your inward spiritual change; but I keep the one half; and yonder, beyond the persecution and the martyrdom, we shall fit the two halves together, and you shall abide with me in the house of your Father and my Father forever and forever."

The church in Ephesus, as we have seen, had pressed its heresy-hunting to the point where it had become blighted by a spiritual pride, and was characterized by a kind of vindictive severity in which love to Christ was wanting. The church in Pergamos had been so kind and tolerant that it stood in danger of judgment. To hold the Christian virtues in just balance requires the best use of all we have and are, together with a true enduement of the grace of God—until we come into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ and are fitted for those everlasting habitations which

God hath prepared for those who love and serve him to the end.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

## Chapter VIII

# THE LETTER TO THYATIRA

### Revelation 2. 18-29

THE Letter to Thyatira is the longest of the seven and the most difficult to understand. It is difficult to understand because the historian and the archæologist have thus far helped us little. In the case of the other cities the historian has sought out references in ancient manuscripts, the excavator has added to our information with his spade, while those who make a study of old coins—and this is a most important source of knowledge—have made many things clear. But in the case of Thyatira this is not so, therefore we cannot understand some of the allusions, and the task of interpretation becomes correspondingly difficult.

Yet there are a few things that we do know. First, as to the location of the city. Imagine a letter H. The two long strokes represent two great and populous river valleys. The short horizontal stroke is a vale connecting the two valleys. On this short line the city of Thyatira was built. Through the centuries it was important, not so much for what it was in itself, as in its relation to the two valleys and their cities. In time of war it was the key to the possession of these valleys. In time of peace it was well situated for trade and was prosperous. It was here probably, that the highly prized cloth, Tyrian purple, was first made, and here the famous purple dye was manufactured. It was a city of many trade guilds including a guild of bronze

workers. Some day, doubtless, we shall know more of this ancient town, but at present our knowledge is slight.

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Christ's Title (verse 18). "These things saith the Son of God." The second psalm, carrying a Messianic import, says, "The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. . . . Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the way." Perhaps Peter had these words in mind when, in response to Christ's "But whom say ye that I am?" he said, "Thou art the Christ, the *Son* of the living God." Jesus' own use of the title as applied to himself formed the basis of the accusation against him before the Sanhedrin. When Pilate declared, "I find no fault in him," the Jews shouted back "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." Paul writes of his Master as one "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." In this title "Son of God," as throughout the Revelation, Christ declares his essential Godhood. The descriptive phrases, "eyes like unto a flame of fire," and "his feet are like fine brass," are understood when we remember that there was probably a cult of sunworshipers in Thyatira, and a guild of bronze workers. His are eyes more powerful than the sun to search out wrong; and his feet are powerful to crush in judgment.

Christ's Praise (verse 19). It is high commendation. "I know thy works." "I see love working out into service, faith working out into endurance." "Service" refers to the unscheduled, untabulated kindnesses. It

is a word for the obscure Christian. "The world little heeds the cup of cold water, but *I* know." "Patience" means peace under pressure, the quality which enables one to be still when all around is tempest tossed, to be hopeful when all seems lost, to face a world in arms and say, "None of these things move me," and to say of oneself:

"One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward;
Never doubted clouds would break;
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake."

"Thy works, . . . the last . . . more than the first." Herein Thyatira differed from Ephesus. Ephesus had lost her first love, and her last works were less than her first. Thyatira has progressed, carrying on toward perfection, realizing the ideal of the Christian life. What exceedingly high praise it is—"I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first."

Christ's Blame (verse 20). "Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel," etc. To understand this we must refresh our memories with a most unpleasant bit of biography from the Old Testament. Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab. His marriage with her was the first instance in which a ruler of the northern kingdom had taken a heathen princess to wife. What manner of wife was she? The writer of First Kings is both frank and terse: "But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the

Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." The whole story is too long to recount. We remind ourselves only of its salient features. Jezebel's father, Ethbaal, was a king, and had formerly been a priest of Astarte, the moon-goddess, and this lascivious worship was prominent in Thyatira when John wrote, hundreds of years after Jezebel's time. Jezebel ruled Ahab as Lady Macbeth ruled Macbeth. When Ahab was infirm of purpose, she wasted no time in grasping the dagger. She slew all the prophets of Jehovah on whom she could lay her hands. On account of this and other sins and crimes the divine judgment was pronounced against her by the prophet Elijah—the dogs would devour her by the gates of Jezreel. Eleven years after Ahab's death this prophecy was fulfilled. Jehu, driving furiously, came to execute judgment upon the royal household. Jezebel painted her face, arrayed her head, looked out of the window, hesitating probably whether to make use of a seductive smile or a royal taunt. "Throw her down," cried Jehu to the eunuchs who surrounded her. She fell in front of Jehu's chariot, which was driven over her body. An hour later, when Jehu remembered that she had been both the daughter and the wife of a king, he gave orders to bury her. But the scavenger dogs had been too quick for him, and there was little left to bury. She died near Naboth's vineyard, which she had secured for Ahab years before by causing the death of the owner. Naboth, one of her many victims, had been stoned to death, the body afterward being eaten by dogs. Not pleasant reading, this old story, but it would be difficult to find, in any literature, ironic, even-handed justice more strikingly portrayed. As this page is written the morning papers

announce that the Harvard excavators, under the direction of Dr. Kirsopp Lake, have laid bare the tower of Jezebel's palace from which she gazed down at Jehu on her day of fate.

So, in the church of Thyatira there was a Jezebel. Language could hardly go farther than that. But who and what was she? All we know is what is told here, from which we must infer that she was a member of the church, and the head of a group in the church, who taught laxity in morals and compliance with heathen standards.

Now, the matter of compliance with, or avoidance of, worldly practices was no simple one. It was an extremely vexed question. It has always vexed the church, though less in our day than when John wrote his letter. It was clearly understood, because the apostles so taught, that Christians were not to withdraw entirely from the pagan community. But how to be in the world and not of it? How to order one's life so that one would not be considered a morose fanatic on the one hand, nor a traitor to the faith on the other? Suppose you were a Roman soldier and had been converted to Christianity. You marched under the colors of your regiment, but you were marching then under the standards of idolatry, for the standards were symbols of the divine authority of Cæsar, and the soldiers were expected to worship them. Standing in the ranks every soldier must pay reverence to the flag. The Christian soldier could not resign. He was bound to the service for a term of years. He could not desert, for apprehension meant death. The rule of the church was that the Christian soldier should remain passive and silent as far as possible, during a service which he could not avoid. But here, as in

every circumstance of life, if the believer were directly challenged, there was but one course possible. He must not deny the faith. He must not comply with a demand which was expressly made a test of loyalty to Christ. Such was the consistent teaching of Saint Paul, and the other apostolic leaders.

But this Jezebel in Thyatira taught otherwise. She taught compliance even under the specific test. Whether the test were judicial, or whether it were merely the test of the pressure of group opinion, we do not know. She "seduced" the Christians "to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." "And I gave her space to repent," etc. (verse 21). Probably John had ordered this woman, at some former time, to cease her activities. She continued to flout his authority.

Christ's Warning (verses 22, 23). It is not necessary to consider the woman as a literal adulteress. In the Old-Testament imagery, which John draws upon so freely, anyone who wandered from Jehovah's law might be described as being unfaithful to the marriage vow, but it should be remembered that her teaching led directly to sexual immorality. Nor is it necessary to translate the Greek *klinan,* "bed." Verse 22 may be read, and some scholars so read it: "I have set her on a dining-couch and her vile associates with her, and they shall have opportunity to enjoy—great tribulation. Unless they repent; for she has shown that she cannot repent." "Kill her children," that is, her disciples and backsliders, "with death," "death" carrying the implication of "deadly plague."

Even so softened the language is terribly severe. It is of a kind that we do not readily associate with Jesus.

Yet Jesus cleansed the Temple with a whip, blazing out at those who had turned a house of prayer into a den of thieves. His excoriation of the Pharisees is the most terrific invective in all literature. And there are times when religion must be rigorous; when it must speak, not like a weeping violin, or a soothing harp, but with the voice of a trumpet. How else could Israel have been preserved in the wilderness? Scotland under the old Calvinistic regime was stern and hard and narrow, but it is doubtful if any milder religion could have tamed that stubborn race, and changed so many of them into mystics and leaders of religious thought. When Puritanism was strong in the world, it was precisely what the world needed. Our Lord's strong language here is, in reality, an expression of his love for a church which must face its weaknesses, amend its ways, or perish. He is like a father who, seeing his son going down into the depths of drunkenness and lechery, cries out to him, "If you go on that way it will kill you."

"Depths of Satan, as they speak" (verse 24). This may be understood in either of two ways. "Depths of Satan" may have been a kind of stock phrase among the cult, like "delusion of mortal mind," or "malicious magnetism." This cult probably claimed to understand hidden things through their knowledge of Satan. Or it may be ironical, a kind of play upon words. For the apostles often spoke of the "deep things of God," and perhaps a sarcastic contrast is intended here, with a change of words. "None other burden." Save that of getting rid of false teachers and holding the works of verse 19 to the end.

Christ's Promise (verses 26, 27, 28). Here again, in verse 27 is the language of the second psalm. Satan is

not the final power. False teaching will vanish away. "Those who live my truth shall rule the world." And this is said to a church in a city whose location suggests more of weakness, less of power, than any other of the seven.

"And I will give him the morning star." Here is the gentle rain after the thunderstorm. What is the morning star? We turn to chapter twenty-two, verse sixteen for our answer. "I am the morning star." To the faithful in Thyatira Christ gives himself. The glory of the Lord shall be the glory of his saints. The promise is true to-day for every man who will accept and follow him. Every man to whom Christ has not appeared walks among the black shadows of illusion. Let the Holy Spirit touch him and he knows his darkness. Yet if he yield his life to Christ, he is included among those concerning whom it was written: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

## Chapter IX

# THE LETTER TO SARDIS

### Revelation 3. 1-6

SARDIS was once the renowned capital of the ancient, mighty kingdom of Lydia. The first historical reference we have to the city is dated 650 B. C. It was captured by the Cimmerians in the seventh century B. C.; by both the Persians and the Athenians in the sixth century B. C.; Antiochus the Great, king of Syria and Babylonia, conquered it at the end of the third century B. C. The whole valley of the Hermus River, in which Sardis was located, was overrun by the Turks at the close of the eleventh century A. D., but they were driven out by the Greek General Philocales some twenty-five years later. The city and the surrounding country were ravaged by both Turks and Christians in the thirteenth century. In 1402 Tamburlane seized and destroyed Sardis. It has never been rebuilt.

What battle-scarred old towns were these which contained the seven churches! Their very soil compounded of the blood and bones of men who

> "Lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
> Loved and were loved,"

and were slain through the ruthlessness of kings to whom conquest was a religion and dominion a quenchless passion.

At the present time two columns of an ancient temple alone mark the site of this once imperial city, the temple having been erected in honor of Cybele, who was the

patron deity of Sardis. She was the great mother goddess, mother of all the gods. Her cults were of the highest importance among ancient religions of the more lascivious type.

The important thing for us to remember is that, while Sardis had once been a city of renown, her glory had departed when this letter was written. Her early importance is made clear by a fragment of authentic history which has come down to us. In the year 55 A. D. a new temple was to be built in Asia Minor for the worship of the emperor. Eleven towns contended for the honor. The envoys from Sardis pleaded their cause with eloquence before the Roman Senate, arguing that their city was a great legendary capital of antiquity; she had been honored with letters of commendation from a Roman general; she had concluded a special treaty with Rome in 171 B. C.; her climate was perfect; her rivers magnificent; the soil of her territories was rich. The Senate listened patiently, then waved them aside. "Sardis is done. Everyone knows that. Let the temple be built in Smyrna."

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Christ's Title (verse 1). "He that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars." "These things" are said by One who has the sevenfold fullness of the divine spirit, and who has the churches under his care and control; the One who, in so far as the churches are concerned, is the very fountain and origin of life. He is the Life-giver who waits for all feeble and half-dead Christian hearts to come into his fullness, to be filled with his never-failing vitality. It is he who in the same verse looses the brief but terrible indictment of his blame.

Christ's Blame (verse 1). "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Yes, they had a "name," that is to say they were "nominal Christians." Here is an allusion which links the church and the city. "Your city's glory has departed. You are like your city. You are dead. And that without excuse. You have not been threatened by persecution; you have not had to contend with Nicolaitans or hateful Jews as your sister churches have, yet you are dead."

What has caused this spiritual death? Perhaps it is self-satisfaction. The traveler lost on the prairie, with the snow falling thick and fast, with his blood coursing more and more slowly, feels a sense of ease. He lies down in the soft, white drifts. They make an easy bed. His self-satisfaction brings his death. Upon all those who are thoroughly satisfied with their standing before God the chill of spiritual coma has begun to steal, for they make no effort to obtain life from the only fountain where it may be found. Perhaps it is failure to stand by the great principles of the faith in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. A dead church is always on the best of terms with a world spiritually moribund. Here is a deserted, roofless house in the country. There are gardens about it, grown up now to weeds. But the weeds have not killed all the flowers. A vagrant rose or lilac bush remains to kindle the imagination, but it only emphasizes the general decay. It only makes more poignant an unknown story of life and love and—death. There are churches like that. Sardis was one of them. A church wherein such life as remains is a pathetic mockery of what might have been. Yonder in Egypt the Sphinx looks out across the eternal desert. That is, the Sphinx once looked out. But now the eyes, together

with the other features, are worn away. Minute grains of sand, blown by the vagrant winds throughout the centuries, have ground them away. And the church in Sardis, filled with self-satisfaction, by imperceptible degrees letting slip her spiritual standards, has been worn down by the abrasive action of the surrounding paganism until her distinctive features as a church of Christ are gone. "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

Christ's Blame also appears in the following verse: "I have not found thy works perfect before God." Literally the reading is: "I have not found thy works finished before God." The idea suggested is that of a fickle church. She rushes from one thing to another, starting many things, finishing few. A dead church, yet a restless church—what a strange combination it is! Yet it is familiar enough in our own time. So many people follow the changing fashions in religion as they do in styles of clothing, books, household decoration or art. They think they are broad when they are shallow. They are set all in a twitter by the latest catchword of the latest cult, echoing its little doctrinettes like parrots, forgetting the mighty, ageless tenets of biblical Christianity, never once saying, "These I believe with all my heart, to these I cleave, God help me, I can do no other."

"But," it will be said in reply, "people are bewildered about religion. They don't know what to believe." True enough. But why are they bewildered? It is because they do not read the New Testament. They have not absorbed even its rudiments. They imagine they need and are finding something new, when as a matter of fact they have only the foggiest notion of what the old is all about.

This, then, is Christ's blame for the church in Sardis. It is dead. It is fickle. Its death is shown in its lack of continuance. Such life as appears is only the spasmodic contraction of the muscles of a corpse before it stiffens in *rigor mortis*. We may be sure there is a warning in this for the church of our day. As this page is written there lies on the desk of the ministers of this country a questionnaire, sent out by some self-constituted authority, which is a type of many similar inquiries. What is the minister's opinion of the League of Nations; military training in schools and colleges; controlled industry; private ownership of banks; fascism, communism, socialism, rugged individualism, and so on through some fifteen detailed items. But what has all this to do with the church? Nothing, directly. Our primary business is to proclaim the redemption of the individual—through faith in the atoning work of Christ, and growth into his likeness through fellowship with him and devoted observance of his teaching. There can be no social gospel without an antecedent individual gospel, and no man can hold the individual gospel in its reality without radiating a propulsive power toward the redemption of society. What is the most powerful denomination in the world to-day? Undoubtedly the Roman Catholic, which pictures the death of Christ in every mass, which offers the chance of confession to each individual, which scorns to ignore the eternal verities of the faith in order to dabble overmuch in the vagaries of an ever-changing social order. The church is not called upon to devalue the dollar to-day, nor to supervise an industrial code to-morrow. The call which the church is commanded to sound is not a call for the redistribution of wealth; it is the trumpet note: "To the law and

to the testimony" of One who said, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?"

Christ's Counsel (verse 2) *a*. "Be careful." This is an allusion as we shall see in a moment. *b*. "Strengthen"—whatever elements of life "remain." *c*. (verse 3). "Remember" what the gospel first meant to you; the joy and power is brought before, like Ephesus, you lost your first love. *d*. "Hold fast," the truth thou knowest well to be true. *e*. "Repent."

Christ's Warning (last part of verse 3). Here is an allusion of more than passing interest. It is the year 546 B. C. Crœsus is king of Lydia. His capital is Sardis. Cyrus, founder of the Persian Empire, appears before the city. Crœsus believes that there is but one way by which an enemy can enter. That way is well guarded. But the city is built on a hill of friable rock. The action of rain and frost and wind has opened a cleft up which an alert enemy can climb if unobserved, as he would be at night. Crœsus, all unaware of this cleft, which the smart scouts of Cyrus had spied out, goes one evening to his bed, planning to rally his forces next day and go down and overwhelm the Persian. He wakes to find the enemy master of the acropolis, and his kingdom lost. The event made a most powerful impression upon the public mind. A king so great, a city so powerful, lost in a single night through an oversight. It was never forgotten. It was referred to in song and story for centuries afterward. And the lesson drawn was: Avoid confidence in self, guard against pride, do not underrate your foe, bear always in mind the deceitfulness of fortune. When John wrote, "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief," the stroke must have gone home with telling effect.

Christ's Praise (verse 4, first part). "Thou hast a few even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." How refreshing that is! We read our morning headlines and, listening to the roar of scandal, murder, dirty politics, and dirty business, we feel there is no white goodness anywhere. But great souls do exist right among us. We overlook the fact that they are doing their work, close to us, so close we brush them daily, going about their task with stellar poise, and with so clean a dignity that, if we could hear it, there is a command from the sky: "Take off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." There were saints, even in Cæsar's household. There are saints in New York, and everywhere else. They are leavening the mass, raising the social average—men and women of whom the world is not worthy.

Christ's Promise (verse 4, last part; verse 5). *a.* They "shall walk with me." All that is comprehended by the term companionship with Christ is promised here. *b.* "In white." "Clothed in white raiment." White has always been the symbol of purity. But in the Roman world white was also the symbol of victory. On a day when a Roman triumph was celebrated white was the universal color. Juvenal writes, in a long poetic description of a triumph:

> "And now the Imperial Eagle raised on high,
> With golden beak, the mark of majesty,
> Trumpets before, and on the left and right
> A cavalcade of nobles all in white. . . ."

*c.* "I will not blot out his name from the book of life." The root idea of the "book of life" is found perhaps in

the roll or register of the citizens of Jerusalem. But Moses used the expression and gave it spiritual significance before Jerusalem existed, when, after the sin of the people in the matter of the golden calf, he prayed for their forgiveness—"And, if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book." *d.* "And I will confess his name." "A living echo of those solemn words of Christ in Luke 12. 8, 9. "Also I say unto you, whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God; but he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God."

Sardis is no more. Neither the city nor the church abides. Two old columns of a heathen temple; the rest is thorns and brambles, wide pastures, the huts of a few nomads—and silence. Yet the city and the church are immortal because John passed on to them the message of the eternal Christ. A message which shall mean as much to the church universal, through all time, as it meant to the church to which it was addressed; which must mean as much to individual Christians now as then, and forevermore.

## Chapter X

# THE LETTER TO PHILADELPHIA

### Revelation 3. 7-13

ONCE upon a time, two centuries and a half before Christ, there were two brothers. One was named Attalus, the other Eumenes. They were nobles, men of rank. Attalus was so true and loyal to Eumenes that he was called Attalus Philadelphus, Attalus the brother-lover. And when Attalus built a certain city in Asia Minor, it was named Philadelphia in his honor. It is now called Allah Shehr, and continues to be inhabited, parts of the wall of the original town still visible. When built, it was a missionary city, in the political sense, for it was founded to provide a unity of Greek spirit, customs, and loyalty in an Oriental land. It was, in short, the apostle of Greek culture. And it was successful. Within fifty years the Lydian tongue was no longer spoken in Lydia, Greek being the only language of the country. In the year 17 A. D. Philadelphia was destroyed by an earthquake and for months thereafter the terrifying shocks were repeated, until the people abandoned their homes, moved out upon the plain, and dwelt in tents.

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Christ's Title (verse 7). "Holy." "True." Holy is the absolute fact; true is the relative fact. Because he is holy he must be true. "True" may have two meanings: one who speaks truth, or one who is genuine. The latter meaning is intended here. He is the genuine Messiah,

having, therefore, the key of David, the key to the Messianic kingdom. The language is borrowed from Isaiah, chapter twenty-two, verse twenty-two: "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." David was always known as the founder of the line which should bring forth Messiah. By Christ's title here we are to understand that he alone controls the entrance to the Messianic kingdom.

Christ's Praise (verses 8 and 10). The words "I have set before thee an open door" may be intended to mean that Philadelphia had been given a unique missionary opportunity. Two facts lend color to this interpretation. First, the church was in a strategic position for such service because several important highways passed her door. Second, Philadelphia was a missionary city in the political sense, and this would make the allusion to the church's missionary opportunity appropriate. But, on the other hand, her means were slender—"thou hast a little strength"—and the general purpose of the letter suggests rather another and quite different interpretation. The meaning seems to be: "You are one of the gates of my kingdom. Because you have been faithful to my word, and have not denied my name, men have been led by you to me, the Door of eternal life."

"Thou hast kept the word of my patience." That is, my word which admonished you to patient endurance under trial. Because you have done this I will guard you in the great trial of persecution which is to come upon all this part of the world where my churches are.

Christ's Counsel (verse 11). "I come quickly." That

is, the time of your patient endurance will be short. Hold fast your splendid fidelity, that no man take away your crown of reward.

Christ's Promise (verses 9, 12). "Which say they are Jews, and are not." To John the true Jew was the believing Christian, whether of Jewish or Gentile blood. The promise here is that even the enemies of the church will acknowledge that she is right in her conviction concerning Christ's Messiahship. "I have loved thee." Philadelphia is the only church which draws this outright assertion of affection.

"Him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God." Upon this sentence Phillips Brooks has made comment in a sermon which is memorable: "What are the ideas which a pillar in a building, a temple, suggests. There are two: Incorporation and Permanence. The pillar is part of the structure. It is there as long as the temple stands. How clear the picture stands before us! There is a great, bright, solemn temple where men come to worship. Its doors are ever open; its windows tempt the sky. . . . The winds come wandering through its high arches. Perhaps the birds stray in and build their nests, and stray away again when the short summer is done. The children roam across its threshold and play for a few moments on its shining floor. Banners and draperies are hung upon its walls awhile, and then carried away. Poor men and women, with their burdens and distresses, come in and say a moment's prayer, and hurry out. Stately processions pass from door to door, making a brief disturbance in the quiet air. Generation after generation comes and goes and is forgotten, each giving its place up to another; while still the temple

stands, receiving and dismissing them in turn, and outliving them all. All these are transitory. All these come into the temple and go out again. . . . But the day comes when the great temple needs enlargement. The plan which it embodies must be made more perfect. It is to grow to a completer self. And then they bring up to the doors a column of cut stone, hewn in the quarry for this very place and no other; and, bringing it in with toil, they set it solidly down as part of the growing structure, part of the expanding plan. It blends with all the other stones. It loses, while it keeps, its individuality. It is useless, except where it is; and yet there, where it is, it has a use which is peculiarly its own, and is different from every other stone's. The walls are built around it. It shares the temple's changes. The reverence that men do to the sacred place falls upon it. The lights of sacred festivals shine in its face. It glows in the morning sunshine, and grows dim and solemn as the dusk passes through the great expanse. . . . The day when it was hewn and set there is forgotten. . . . It is part of the temple where the men so long dead set it so long ago. . . . 'Him will I make a pillar in the temple of my God.' Can we not see the meaning of that? All men are continually passing into and out of the temple of God, whether they are aware of it, or wish it, or otherwise. But occasionally one cries out: 'Help me, O God, to do thy perfect will forever. I am not worthy to be called thy son.' And the answer comes: 'Thy sins be forgiven thee. This my son was dead and is alive again.' That one becomes a pillar. His, forever after, is the calm assurance of the pillar which feels the pressure of the wall about it, and

knows itself in the eternal purpose and in the eternal keeping."[1]

So is the man who, once for all, in humility and appropriating faith, becomes a citizen of the kingdom of Christ. He "goes no more out," as these poor Philadelphians were compelled to go out into the fields in the days of the earthquakes. He is a pillar, incorporated and permanent, and on that pillar is written the name of God; the name of the New Jerusalem coming down to earth out of heaven. Of the world redeemed and renovated by the genuine Messiah—the holy and the true—the humblest believer, he who has but little strength but still is steadfast, whether he be Gentile or Jew, is an integral part.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

[1] From *Sermons*. Reprinted by permission of E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York, publishers.

## Chapter XI

# THE LETTER TO LAODICEA

### Revelation 3. 14-22

THE city of Laodicea was built for a twofold purpose. It was designed to guard a junction of important military roads; and its duty was, as in the case of Philadelphia, to further Greek interests among an Asiatic people. While Philadelphia was notably successful in her task of propaganda, Laodicea was a lamentable failure. Why one failed and the other succeeded we do not know.

The valley in which the city lay was noted for the production of a fine quality of wool, soft and glossy black in color. This was obtained by breeding and crossing sheep according to some system which is no longer known. The rules of this cross-breeding were so important that they were guarded with religious care. The great secret had been lost for centuries, and the sheep of the Lycus valley are sheep now and nothing more.

There was a famous school of medicine in Laodicea, and the likenesses of the more important physicians have been preserved for us on old coins. It was here that Phrygian stone, a kind of powder renowned as a cure for diseases of the eye, was produced. But Laodicea was primarily a city of commerce, trade, and banking. In the year 51 B. C. Cicero brought orders, or checks, to be cashed by the great financial houses. Beyond these details it is possible to say only that, with such knowledge as we have at the present time,

Laodicea is more difficult to portray than any of the other seven cities except Thyatira. It has no outstanding features, geographically or historically. Perhaps this negative quality might be considered its chief characteristic. It was pliable. It could adapt itself to the wishes and needs of others. It was not unwilling to compromise to "get the business." It got the business. It grew rich. It was drab, corrupt, and contented.

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Christ's Title (verse 14). "The Amen." The One who is the spirit of verity; of correct, positive affirmation; the Word of God who fulfills all that God has spoken. He is therefore a "true witness." How often in the days of his flesh Jesus said, "Verily, verily, *I* say unto you!" To Pilate, who asked him if he were a king, he made it clear that he was King of Truth. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." And now to this wavering, spineless church he asserts his uncompromising character as the revealer of eternal and changeless reality. "The beginning of the creation of God." He is the agent, the incipient cause, of all that comes to pass in God's world, and being so is therefore high above all possibility of any misstatement of the truth.

Christ's Blame (verse 15-17). Here is a portrayal of the spiritual condition of the Laodiceans. They say, not in so many words, but by their attitude: "We are good people. We don't care to be any better than we are. We don't need to be any better than we are." "So then because thou art lukewarm, . . . I will spue thee out of my mouth." The words are quoted

from Leviticus 18. 28. It is a strong and picturesque way of saying, "I am utterly and completely disgusted with you." This is the only church of the seven for which the Master expresses disgust. The principle underlying the statement is the same which is expressed in Matthew 21: 31. "Verily I say unto you [priests and elders of the people], That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Better than a comparative warmth, in which you rest content, would be the absolute cold from which you might conceivably turn to seek the Sun of Righteousness.

How do these Laodiceans show their complacency? "Thou sayest," etc. (verse 17). "And knowest not that thou art wretched" (oppressed with a burden); "and miserable" (pitiable); "and poor" (like a wayside beggar); "and blind" (seeing nothing clearly of, and with no wide vision for, the things of the Spirit); "and naked" (your purple and fine linen will decay, and when it goes, there is no robe of Christ's righteousness to cover you).

Christ's Counsel (verse 18). "Buy of me gold," etc. The gold of character will be yours if you pass through the fires of persecution and do not deny the faith. If you put by your lackadaisical complacency and meet your trials strong in my strength, yours shall be the fine gold, not of your banks, but of your rewarded steadfastness, and thus you shall be really rich. "Buy . . . white raiment." Not the cloth made from your famous wool, but the white raiment of purity and victory, that you may be really clothed. "And anoint thine eyes with eyesalve." Not with the powder of your famed Phrygian stone, but with the salve of sincerity and single-minded-

ness. "For if thine eye be single," said Jesus on one occasion, "thy whole body shall be full of light." Anoint your eyes that you may *see* that to which you are now so blind.

Concerning the next three verses (19-22) there is a sharp difference of opinion. By some they are regarded as an integral part of the letter to Laodicea. Some hold that the letter ends with verse eighteen. It would seem better to regard them as a kind of postscript which applies to all seven of the letters, including Laodicea, so that Laodicea is not exclusively addressed, but inclusively—a postscript for Laodicea, but for the other six as well, in which the message is not so much for each church regarded as a group as for the individuals who compose the group.

"As many as I love," etc. (verse 19). Throughout the letters there have been words of rebuke, strong and terrible. Now Christ explains this, laying down the principle which runs through both Testaments: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."

"Behold I stand at the door," etc. (verse 20). Here is a twofold significance. To the heart of every man who has ever heard of Christ he pleads for entrance. But he also knocks at the heart's door in the providences which touch our lives. Therefore, in the great persecution which is just at hand, he seeks a fuller entrance, that he may guide and protect. "If any man . . . open, . . . I will come in to him and will sup." Eating together is a common symbol of companionship in the Messianic kingdom. Often in the Gospels the Master refers to a day when his disciples shall sit at table with him in his kingdom. And possibly the living breath of the

figure here is an allusion to the Lord's Supper. As he ate with his disciples at the close of his earthly ministry, so now, at the end of these letters, he refers to it as an appropriate symbol of fellowship in his eternal commonwealth. He ate with them before he suffered; then he triumphed. Now they will triumph because he and they are in a spiritual companionship.

Now comes the climax of the promise which applies to each individual member of the seven churches. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne" (verse 21). This was a promise which Jesus frequently made to his disciples, as recorded in the Gospels. It bears the stamp of the thought-forms of the times in which it was spoken. It was a time when the ideal and ambition of all men reached out toward a throne. To the Greek, the Roman, and the Jew the goal of life was dominion. The Israelite saw Messiah as one who should give his people lordship over nations. The Roman saw his destiny fulfilled when he should have finished his work of universal empire. But as Jesus spoke the words to his first disciples there was something incredible if not absurd in the assurance. These disciples were, for the most part, from the lower orders of society. Not only to the proud Roman, marching to victory, and to the proud Jew, counting his noble ancestry of priests and warriors by the score, but to the disciples themselves there was something grotesque in the very idea that they should ever sit upon a throne. It was a presumption almost insane in the age in which they lived. And so it must seem to us; for here is a throne of judgment, while the very essence of the Christian ideal lies, not in aspiring to a throne of judgment, but to a deep humility.

There is, however, a deeper meaning in the words. It is this: No man has the right to pass judgment on his fellow men in respect to their sins unless, tried himself, he has overcome. No man has a right to pass judgment on the fears or cowardice of his fellow men unless he has faced danger and shown himself fearless. Any man who takes the throne of judgment without these experiences has no right to be there. And every man who has had these experiences will temper judgment with a large measure of charity because he knows the bitter hazard of the struggle, and how, in it, his own feet had well-nigh slipped. Jesus' right to judge rested upon his experience in Gethsemane and on Calvary. So must it be with his disciples. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

Laodicea the unpraised! For every other church there is something of commendation, but Laodicea the complacent is unworthy of any. Laodicea the self-satisfied, is the one which merits only disgust. But even so, it is not hopeless. Had it been, there would have been no warning and no counsel. Few churches are wholly complacent. But all are in more or less danger of becoming so. And there is a duty incumbent upon every congregation which is as solemn as every injunction laid upon us by the Head of the church must be. It is that we constantly inquire how we may be more loyal; how we may more effectively extend the Kingdom; how we may transmute the gifts to the treasury into spiritual values. How shall we order our affairs as a church, and how shall we live our individual lives, that the love of Christ which saves and transforms and heals and comforts may be applied to the open wounds in human

hearts? "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." May God deliver us from ever pronouncing that curse upon ourselves. "And knowest not that thou art . . . blind." May God deliver us from that blindness. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." May God help each church to throw wide that door until the Master can say: "I know thy works. Thou art rich: rich in Christian love, rich in unwearying service, rich in your continuing, unwavering desire to make my truth and my love potent in the lives of men."

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

## Chapter XII

# THE POWER AND MAJESTY OF GOD

### Revelation 4

WE now come to the study of the fourth chapter of Revelation. It is a strange passage. Here are trumpets and thrones, jasper and sardine stones, a rainbow, four and twenty elders, thunders and lightnings, a crystal sea, and winged beasts full of eyes behind and before. How hard it is to understand! Is it possible to make any sense at all out of such strange figures, so strangely mixed?

Before we proceed to answer the question let us look back over that part of the book which we have already considered. First, we noted the purpose of the writer. It was to prepare the early church for the trial of persecution which awaited her. It was in pursuance of this purpose that the author gave us, in chapter one, the title "Jesus Christ" expanded to a full significance; then a salutation to the church, rising to an ascription of praise to Christ. The remainder of the chapter furnished a vision of Christ, the first vision of the Son of man which John received. We then found in chapters two and three a series of letters, addressed to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor, and through them to the Church Universal in all ages.

Now, with the beginning of chapter four we come to another distinct section of the book. In verse 1 we have "after this," which is the customary formula for the introduction of a new division throughout Revelation.

This section is designed to impress upon the church the Glory and Power of the Creator, and the Glory and Power of the Redeemer. There are but two chapters in this section, chapters four and five. Chapter four deals with the glory and power of God the Father. It sets forth the omnipotence of God. If we ask why John does this at this point, the answer is simple. His whole purpose is the reassurance of the church. If she is to be delivered, she must have a strong deliverer. "With a God like this," says the seer, "why should you be afraid?"

This is John's message. But he goes about giving it in a way peculiar to himself. It is a way which seems strange to us, but which did not seem so to the early church. To-day, if a preacher were to attempt to assure us concerning an omnipotent and loving Providence he might make a philosophical approach, seek to prove that God is, that he is all powerful, and that he is good. Or, he might make a historical approach, tracing God's overarching care in the experience of the race. Or, again, he might find firm ground in Christ's teaching—that God is Father and the hairs of our heads are all numbered. But none of these methods is the method of John. He was instructed to proceed in his reassurance of the church by the use of highly imaginative language in which is woven the language of the Old-Testament prophets, together with many passages from other early writings, not all of which are known to us. It is this combination of John's own strange speech with that of other, earlier, apocalyptists which makes this chapter, and many others, so obscure to us, unused as we are to these literary forms.

Thus recalling the purpose, and the method, of the

writer we can go forward to consider the verses of chapter four. And we shall find they are not at all as difficult as they appear at first sight.

Verse 1. "After this." The words not only introduce another section of the book, but they serve to remind us that the foregoing chapters refer mainly to this present life. There has been reference to "where Satan's seat is," and much of labor, patience, poverty, and tribulation. Now, the vision is of the scene in heaven, of perfect splendor, sanctity, and bliss. "Voice . . . of a trumpet." Christ's voice, as we saw in 1. 10. "I will show thee things which must be." "Must be" because it is the will of God.

Verse 2. "Immediately I was in the spirit." John is now in a state of prophetic ecstasy in which he seemingly leaves the body behind and enters into heaven. Then we have the beginning of what he sees in heaven: a "throne" and "One," that is, God, upon the throne.

Verse 3. "And he that sat," etc. It was the custom of the Old-Testament writers to portray the glory of God in terms of light. His splendor is that of dazzling illumination. In Ezekiel's prophecy God and his throne are seen in the brilliancy of glowing metal. In Daniel's vision his raiment is white as snow, his throne as fiery flames. The one hundred and fourth psalm says: "Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment." Paul, writing to Timothy, speaks of "the blessed and only Potentate, . . . dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto."

"And there was a rainbow round about the throne." There is beauty and significance here which we must not pass too hastily. Here is a throne of judgment, *and* —a rainbow. We recall the story in Genesis. The

judgment of God was expressed in the Flood. His love was expressed in the rainbow which afterward spanned the skies. Here the judgment and the love are simultaneous. The charm and truth of the figure lie in this, that it brings the solemn sovereignty of God and the beauty, loveliness, and mercy of God, so into oneness that each quality is seen to inhere in the other. He is the indivisible God, all of whose majesty is beautiful, and all of whose beauty is majestic. John would teach us that we are not to pluck one attribute of Deity away from the others, but to hold them all in even balance before our minds. The failure to do this has confused theology always. It makes theology easy, but it makes it false. The throne is a lie without the rainbow; the rainbow is a lie without the throne. If we begin with the majesty of God, and tack his love on later in our scheme of thought; or, if we begin with the divine amenities and afterward drag in his judgments, we shall in either case end in intellectual and spiritual chaos. We shall have in the one case a despot, in the other a spineless old grandfather. We must remember that whenever God acts, he acts in the totality of his being; that his justice and mercy and love have no existence apart from each other; that he has no pet attribute, but that all of him is in everything that he does.

Verse 4. "Seats." That is, thrones. "Elders." Angelic kings, of the highest order in the hierarchy of heaven. Why twenty-four elders? Perhaps because there were twelve patriarchs at the head of the twelve tribes, and twelve apostles. Thus the suggestion would be that both the New and the Old Covenant unite in the worship of the Almighty.

Verse 5. "Lightnings," etc. Common figures in the

portrayal of the majesty of God. "Voices," that is, voices of tempest-winds. "Seven." The fullness, completeness of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 6. The floor of the throne-room was like glittering rock crystal. "In the midst, and round about,"etc. The statement is equivalent to "one in the middle on each of the four sides," supporting the throne. "Beasts." Better, Living Ones. "Eyes," signifying high intelligence, great powers of perception. In this verse the Ezekiel influence is prominent. Compare Ezekiel 10.

Verse 7. Here are mentioned four of the higher orders of creation. "Calf" is better translated "ox"; "eagle," as an eagle in flight. A concept crept into the interpretation of this verse in earliest times, wholly fanciful, but having a deep influence on early Christian art. According to this idea the man represents Matthew; the lion, Mark; the ox, Luke; and the eagle, John. These typify the human, active, sacrificial, and spiritual aspects of the gospel.

Verse 8. The influence of Isaiah 6 is clearly seen in this description.

Verse 9. "When," that is, "whenever."

Verse 10. However high the rank of the elders may be, it is as nothing before the rank of God himself. Therefore their "crowns" are "cast before the throne."

Verse 11. By thy will they *are*. All things from the beginning were in the Eternal mind. When God so willed it, his ideas became clothed in the visible form of created things. There is a tendency in our time to question the wisdom of creation. Some of our writers of the languid school would have us believe that it were better that no world had ever been created, and no man ever born. This certainly is

not a Jewish nor Christian concept. When Longfellow wrote:

"Life is real, life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul,"

he spoke in the spirit of the Bible. When Robert Browning said:

"Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made:
Our times are in his hand
Who saith: 'A whole I planned,
Youth show but half; trust God; see all, nor be afraid,' "

he spoke as a Hebrew-Christian prophet. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things."

So, with the setting down of his vision, John has said to the church: With a God like this, what have you to fear? And writing thus he has reminded us of one of the foundation stones of our Christian faith. And we sing, in the fullness of our faith,

"Under the shadow of thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defense is sure."

And a man without a living relationship to that God is an orphan in time and a vagabond in eternity —without God, and without hope, both now and in the life everlasting.

## Chapter XIII

# THE POWER AND GLORY OF CHRIST

### Revelation 5

CHAPTER four told of the majesty and glory of God the Father; Chapter five portrays the power and glory of Christ the Son. There, we thought of the Creator, here, of the Redeemer. The purpose of each chapter is the same. With a God like this, says chapter four, why should the church fear? With a Redeemer like this, says chapter five, why should the saints tremble though all the powers of hell, including the persecuting Roman Empire, be leagued against her?

Verse 1. "Him," God the Father. "Book." That is, roll. Rolls were usually written on one side of the parchment only. In this case the writing is on both sides, indicating the fullness of the contents. This roll contains the decrees of God concerning the future.

Verse 2. "Strong angel . . . loud voice." A voice strong enough to fill the universe. "Worthy." It is not a superb physical strength which is necessary for the one who should open the roll, but one whose rank, character, and record of service is such that he is fit for this supreme office.

Verse 3. "No man." No man in all the universe was "able," that is, had the peculiar ability and fitness for the task of opening, nor to "look therein," that is, to comprehend the contents.

Verse 4. "I." The seer. "Wept much." He weeps because he fears that the promise of 4. 1 is not to be fulfilled.

Verse 5. These two descriptive phrases are Messianic and are taken, in the one case from Genesis 49. 9, in the other from Isaiah 11. 1, 10. The one is from the Law, the other from the prophets. Often, if not always, in the Old-Testament records Judah held the foremost place. Is there a battle to be fought? The men of Judah are the shock troops. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." "Root." A shoot coming up from an ancient stock or root. "I am the root and offspring of David," said Jesus, declaring himself to be of the Messianic line. "Hath prevailed." Because of what he was, and because of what he had done, overcoming sin upon his cross, and death through the empty tomb, he is "able," that is, *worthy* to open the book and loose the seals which shall reveal the decrees of God concerning the future.

Verse 6. "Midst," that is, midst of the group about the throne of God. "Lamb." On its body the marks of slaughter, yet the Lamb "stood" indicating life after death. "Horns." The horn was the symbol of power; seven horns, perfect power. The "eye" was the symbol of intelligence. Thus we have Omnipotence and Omniscience. And Omniscience here is identified with the "seven spirits," that is, with the fullness of the divine Spirit. The verse is reminiscent of 2 Chronicles 16. 9. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." There are some who hold that the fourth Gospel and Revelation could not have been written by the same man. But it is worthy of note that none of the Gospels save the fourth refers

to Jesus as the "Lamb"; and that the term is used of Christ no less than twenty-nine times in the Apocalypse. The Gospel, however, always uses *amnos*. The Revelation always uses *arnion*, "Little Lamb," intensifying the conception of sacrificial innocence.

Verse 7. This verse ends the "sealed book" portion of the chapter.

Verse 8. Here begins the adoration of the Lamb. "Harps." Prominent in Old-Testament worship. "Odors." A beautiful figure referring to the prayers of the suffering saints still on earth.

Verse 9. "New song." Expressive of gratitude for new mercies. The expression is used frequently in the Psalms. "I will sing unto the Lord a new song."

Verse 10. As God's peculiar people these saints shall reign, having overcome.

Verse 11. A great augmented chorus singing in unison the words of verse 12. Further augmented it sings the words of the last part of verse 13. After which, verse 14, the four Living Ones say "Amen," the four and twenty angelic kings make silent obeisance to him that liveth forever and ever.

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### SERMON OUTLINE

There are four things in the chapter to be noted particularly.

1. The Sealed Book. It is suggestive of the Divine Sovereignty. The purposes of God are from everlasting. He foresees whatsoever cometh to pass. The successive events which make up history are contemporaneous from the beginning in the consciousness of Deity. The purposes of God, forming a vast, preconcerted plan are

sealed in mystery. They transcend all finite intelligence. It is Christ, who now as God incarnate, and now as glorified, unfolds for us the divine plan. But not all is unveiled. "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." Finally, in the presence and companionship of Christ, we shall know even as we are known. God's great plan shall be as clear to us as the plan of our little lives is now to him.

2. The Slain Lamb. The doctrine of the atonement. "Weep not," said the angel, "for the Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed to open the book." John looked, then, to behold a lion—and beheld a lamb! A lamb, emblem of meekness; a slain lamb, emblem of sacrifice. Yet this lamb had seven horns, indicating perfect power, and seven eyes, indicating perfect wisdom. This is suggestive of the mistake which we so often make—that something other than spiritual power finally rules. We think that power is to be found in kings and presidents and dictators, in Congresses and Parliaments and convocations and conferences of the great. If we were wise, we should know there is far greater power in wives and mothers and homes. The disciples, when Christ came, were looking for a Lion. They believed that Messiah would appear suddenly, the hosts of paganism would gather against him, and in one terrible last Armageddon he would conquer, and ride victorious over a bloody field. But when the angel announced his arrival to the shepherds, he said: "This is the sign. He is a babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger." Our chapter does not indicate that he is worthy of glory and honor because he is strong, but because he has been slain, and by being slain has redeemed us unto God through sacrificial love.

Power belongs to love. It is the most potent of all potencies. Only love has any right to power, for love alone knows how to use it. The lion conquers for awhile; the lamb in the end. The Roman eagle is dead; the Lamb lives on forever. Riches belong to love. The lamb, not the lion, receives the final riches, for riches is not something we hold in the hand, but something which increases the richness of the world's life. Wisdom belongs to love. The cynical man and the misanthrope may pride themselves on their knowledge of human nature, and always express a low opinion of it. They are like one who looks out on a winter landscape and declares there is no life beneath the snow. It is only love that is wise, for love alone sees the possibilities of human nature. It was only the small circle who loved Lincoln who recognized his greatness before destiny had set its mark upon him. It was the lowly dissenters of Germany who, loving Luther, saw him in his real stature before the Reformation made him immortal. It was love which saw in recreant and unstable Simon, the apostle Peter. To the Lamb belong power and wisdom and riches because, with him, they spring from love and are utilized for the purposes of love. Conscience is a great glory—conscience that discerns righteousness and understands it; faith is a great glory—faith which rejoices in the invisible and eternal; hope is a great glory—hope that beckons a man to an ever larger and nobler achievement. But the greatest of all is love. To love comes the song of universal blessing. To the Lamb. To the Lamb as it had been slain.

3. The Power and Beauty of the chapter as a whole. There is a story which relates how Carlyle was once staying as a guest in a home, and was asked to read the

Bible one morning at family prayers. He read on and on until his hearers were almost exhausted. When, later, someone remonstrated with him his reply was: "But, mon, 'tis poetry!" Here is the poetry of overwhelming, inexpressible divine truth. First, one strong angel, with a voice to fill the world, speaks to us in verse two. Then, by way of contrast, a voice of quiet comfort speaks in verse five—"weep not." In verse six, a Lamb appears, eloquent only in silence—"As a lamb before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." Verse eight begins the great ascription of praise to the Lamb. Four Living Ones and four and twenty angelic kings play the sweet music of their harps, singing, full-throated their song of adoration. In verse eleven, with the Living Ones and the angelic kings, is blended the voice of all the host of heaven, and in verse thirteen every living thing from earth's and sea's and heaven's remotest bound blend and thunder their voices in an overwhelming harmony of praise. Then, after the mighty crescendo, the holy diminuendo. The awe-inspiring volume of sound falls to a haunting echo, as the Four Living Ones say "Amen," and the four and twenty angelic beings fall upon their faces in silent homage before the throne of Christ who liveth forevermore.

What a model for church music! Why has no Handel, no Bach, put this chapter in deathless oratorio? Perhaps for the same reason that no one has ever successfully painted the ranges of the Rocky Mountains—because it is impossible to capture them on canvas. Here is a music which will not be cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in to the lines of the staff and the tracery of notes. Here is a divine strain which leaps through all earthly devices of harmony and escapes. It is not the "still, sad

music of humanity." It is the reverberant, cosmic music of heaven and earth proclaiming, against all the threats of principalities and powers, Rome and her emperor included, throughout all the future years: Fear not, little flock. It is yourselves who shall reign. For it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

## Chapter XIV

# THE FIRST SIX SEALS

### Revelation 6

CHAPTER six opens a new section of the book. Chapters four and five formed the preceding section. In the last chapter we beheld God seated upon a throne, having in his hand a great roll, containing his decrees for the future. It was found that only the Redeemer, the slain Lamb, was worthy to break the seven seals and open the roll.

Now, with the beginning of chapter six, the breaking of the seals actually begins and the future unrolls before us. At this point the main action of the book begins. The section upon which we now enter extends from 6. 1 to 18. 24 and brings before us the fearful struggle of the church, the judgment of God upon her enemies, and her final triumph. It is not factual, but poetic. Regarded as historical detail it has not been fulfilled, nor is it likely to be, according to any reasonable interpretation of Revelation. What we see is the source from which the tribulations come, and the broad principles by which the final victory is gained. It is also to be noticed that at this point the stream of prophecy broadens. Heretofore local elements have been prominent; hereafter we shall find more of the universal.

Verse 1. "One of the four" Living Ones. To whom does he speak? Not to John, nor to Christ as some contend, but to the first of the four riders.

Verse 2. The symbolism is that of conquest. White is the symbol of victory. The bow denotes the conqueror. The crown suggests a regal warrior who overcomes his enemies.

Who is the rider of the white horse? Christ? Or the first of four messengers of destruction? Able commentators, among them Milligan, have held that the reference is to Christ, thus correlating the passage with 19. 11-16 The weight of evidence, however, runs strongly against this interpretation. (Compare C. A. Scott, *in loc.* Also Beckwith.)

Verse 4. Red is the symbol of war, or rather that part of conquest which is slaughter. "To take peace," etc. Peace is the right of mankind, but always, through man's stupidity, peace is taken from the earth. "That they should kill," that is, slaughter one another. "Kill" here is the same word that is used of the "slain" Lamb in chapter five. Since men will not accept the slain Lamb, they are doomed to have peace taken from them continually, and to slay one another.

Verse 5. Black is the symbol of famine, as the verse explains by what is said of the balances. Food is to be weighed, not sold by measure, because it is scarce. Yet the famine is not a total one. In ordinary times a "penny" (*denarius*), which was a day's pay for a laborer, would buy eight measures of good grain, such as wheat; now it would buy only three measures of the inferior barley. The partial character of the famine is also indicated by the closing words of the verse—the olive orchards and the vineyards are not to be destroyed.

Verse 8. "Pale," that is, livid. The greenish, ashen hue of a corpse. "Hell." Hades, the abode of the dead. Death thrusts in the sickle, Hades garners. "Fourth

part of the earth." The exact meaning of the words is unknown, but they indicate that the afflictions foretold do not, at the beginning, affect the entire world at the same time. "Sword, famine, death [by pestilence], wild beasts" form a climax in which the Ezekiel and Jeremiah influence is prominent.

Verse 9. The scene now shifts from events on earth to events in heaven. "Under the altar," etc. The thought is not derived from the Old Testament but from Jewish writers many years later. In the time of Christ, according to Jewish belief, the souls of the martyrs and all the holy dead were kept under the altar which was before the throne of God. One of the old Rabbinic writers records that God said unto the soul of Moses, "I will gather thee under the throne of my glory." "For the word of God, and for the testimony." The two things are the same. There was a deposit of faith, a Gospel declared, and this they held, dying rather than surrender or deny it.

Verse 10. A cry for vengeance. It does not in the least sound like Stephen's "Lay not this sin to their charge," nor Christ's "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Yet it is something more than a cry for vengeance. It is a demand for the vindication of God's justice. In Luke 18. 1-5 Jesus tells the story of the unjust judge and the importunate widow, adding the words: "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him?"

Verse 11. The prayer for vengeance is not yet answered, but as individuals these saints possess the white robes which signify the rewards of their righteous lives. "Rest." They are to rest in blessedness until the full vindication of God's righteousness and justice is ac-

complished. The thought is similar to that of Hebrews 11. 39, 40.

Verses 12, 13, 14. A more or less common form of language used in both the Old and the New Testaments to describe events which precede a divine judgment. So Jesus speaks in Matthew 24. 6, 7. Also verses 29-31.

Verse 15. An all-inclusive judgment on the wicked. "Great men," that is, members of the royal court. "Mighty men," that is, soldiers, or athletes capable of great feats of valor. "Hid themselves," because (verse 14) the sky has disappeared and the eyes of Deity look down unveiled upon the wicked.

Verse 16. Better that mountains should fall upon them than they should bear those eyes of judgment.

Verse 17. A reference to the final Judgment.

"Highly colored as the language used under the sixth seal may appear to us, to the Jew animated by the spirit of the Old Testament it was simply that in which he had been accustomed to express his expectation of any new dispensation of the Almighty, of any striking crisis in the history of the world. . . . To every great crisis in human history, and to the close of all, they may be fittingly applied" (Milligan).

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Before leaving the chapter let us consider two things. The first is suggested by the four horsemen of verses two to eight. In 1914 the white horse of conquest, the Kaiser of Germany astride, moved out to give challenge to the world. As a result of that challenge the map of the world was changed in Europe, Asia, and Africa. The red horse of slaughter transformed Europe into a shambles with uncounted hosts of dead. To-day the

black horse of famine paws at the doors of half mankind, and death and hell ride everywhere abroad. We look to Europe and we see Germany lusting for the possession of Austria in order that the spearhead of German dominion may be advanced toward the heart of the continent. She has torn up the treaty of Versailles as just another scrap of paper, and openly rearms against "Der Tag." England and France are engrossed with desperate internal problems, so much so that they may not be able to come to Austria's help effectively. The whole world shivers in the presence of the European prospect.

Or, we look to the Far East. There Russia and Japan glare at each other across the Siberian border. Russia is mobilizing a great army. She concentrates her energies on airplanes because she knows that it will be all but impossible to maintain large bodies of troops in Siberia, far from her bases of supplies, while a few bombs dropped into the fragile, inflammable structure of Japanese cities will work untold havoc. Meanwhile she is working feverishly to parallel the trans-Siberian railway with a line farther north, so that in case Japan captures the present line, Russia will not be cut off.

Japan, groaning under an intolerable load of taxation, is appropriating enormous sums for her army and navy and bending her energies to working out a defense against aircraft. She is firmly resolved to dominate all Asia. The United States, having sought in vain for years for a reduction of armaments among all nations, turns from the disarmament effort with something like despair, to build her navy up to treaty strength. What does it all portend? The end of the world? The final Judgment? We cannot assert that. We know not the

final purposes of God. We are not literalists who would push these cryptic phrases of Revelation to that as a necessary conclusion. On the other hand, who can read the book and look out upon the course of events and say that the Judgment and the end are not close at hand? Ours is a day when everyone who thinks is filled with concern for the future of mankind. In the heart of every man who thinks there is a fear—a fear of social changes which shall be wholly destructive.

The second thing to be noted is the dramatic contrast between the end of chapter five and the end of chapter six. Look back to 5. 13. "And every creature . . . heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever." Then read 6. 15, 16, 17. "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." Who are those who sing? They are those who have accepted Christ as Lord and Redeemer of their lives. Who are those who wail their wild prayers, not to God, but to the mountains, for hiding from calamities too great to be faced? Those who have rejected the Lord of Glory, who have said, "We have need of no Saviour, we have no time for religion." Let every one of us who has not made peace with God through faith in Christ, accept Christ to-day. This, for the peace and joy it will bring to our hearts, and that we may be found blameless, redeemed by his precious blood, both now and at the last great day. For

it is appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment. In the midst of life we are in death; and whosoever liveth and believeth in him shall have abundant life and shall never die.

## Chapter XV

## ASSURANCE; PRAISE; TENDERNESS

### Revelation 7

IN chapter six we followed the story of the breaking of the seven seals. The last seal mentioned in that chapter is the sixth. We would expect that the breaking of the sixth seal would be followed immediately by the breaking of the seventh. But our author has chosen otherwise. Before the seventh seal is broken he gives us chapter seven, which is a parenthesis, an interlude-episode, which will comfort and sustain the church before the final, climacteric woes are revealed by the breaking of the last seal. It is an example of John's consistent literary practice throughout the book. It is his habit to introduce, at a crisis, or turning-point, a passage such as this, looking beyond immediate events to some great and happy outcome at the end, his art thus throwing something of light upon the darkest picture. It might have been feared, as the terrific events of the six seals were pictured, that the church herself would perish in such overwhelming catastrophes, but here the author makes clear that this is not to be the case.

The chapter consists of two visions, the first extending from verse 1 to verse 8, the second, from verse 9 to verse 17.

Verse 1. "Four." The four points of the compass. "Winds," upon which the Almighty rides in judgment and which are under his control. "Trees." Objects which may be laid flat, and are thus most visibly affected by wind.

Verse 2. "East." Revised Version: "From the sunrising." This angel comes with the light and hope symbolized by the sunrise.

Verse 3. "Sealed." Not to be confused with the seals of the roll. The seal is a signet, an instrument by means of which a seal is affixed. In New-Testament usage "seal" may have three meanings. *a.* To authenticate. "Him hath the Father sealed," is said of Jesus in John 6. 27. *b.* To indicate ownership. Slaves were branded. Hence in Paul's letters the word refers to God's possession. *c.* An assurance of safety, on the ground of ownership, in which case the seal is a protective mark. Here *b* and *c* are combined. The saints are in God's possession, and therefore under his protection. One recalls what Hamlet says concerning his father's care for his mother:

> "So loving to my mother,
> That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
> Visit her face too roughly."

Verses 4-8. Why one hundred and forty-four thousand? A multiple of twelve, which was the number of the apostles, and of the patriarchs of the tribes. It is a symbol of completeness. Every member of every tribe, of all races, and in all places who are loyal to God, shall have his protection. The naming of the tribes might indicate that Jewish Christians only are referred to, but with John there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision. To John, as to Paul, the true Israel is composed of those who have believed in Christ.

Verse 9. Here begins the second vision of the chapter, the scene shifting now from earth to heaven. The sealing has been conceived of as accomplished on the earth;

now we are before the throne in heaven. "No man could number." The same persons are referred to in both visions. In the first we have an exact, if symbolic, number. Here no "man" can count them. In the first vision the redeemed are seen with the eye of God who calleth his own by name, the very hairs of their heads being numbered. In the second they are seen by man who has no supernatural arithmetic. We remember how God once called Abraham out into the night. "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them." But the psalmist says: "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names." . . . The "robes" and "palms" are symbols of victory and joy, recalling here our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Verse 10. The work of salvation is ascribed to God *and* to Christ. This is the highest possible ascription of praise. Paul speaks in similar vein when he writes of the "manifold *wisdom* of God, according to his eternal purpose [of salvation] which he purposed in Jesus Christ" and of "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believed, according to . . . his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ."

Verse 12. "Amen." A liturgical affirmation of gratitude uttered by the redeemed. Each ascription of praise to God points back to verse 10 with special reference to his salvation.

Verse 13. "What are these?" A rhetorical question, not literally asked of the seer, but used in order that his attention may be drawn to the scene with more particular keenness.

Verse 14. "Sir." A title of profound respect. "Knowest." The word here has the same force as in the fourth

Gospel, not mere information, but something more profound. The response to John's "thou knowest" is given in three parts. *a.* "Came out," etc. Not merely a special tribulation at the end of the world's history, but trials experienced by God's children all along the way of their pilgrimage. *b.* "Washed their robes," etc. The reference is not alone to their justification, or sanctification, but to the whole cleansing efficacy of Christ's work: pardon, removal of sin, renewal of life—the new creature. *c.* "Made white." Not only are they clean, but glistering white in the fullness of the glory of redemption.

Verses 15, 16, 17. "They shall serve," in the innermost sanctuary of the temple, for God "dwells among them." Then follow the great promises. "Neither shall the sun light on them." Shade is a primary blessing in a hot, arid country. "Heat," that is, the sirocco. "The Lamb . . . shall like a shepherd lead [guide] them." The language of the promises is all suggested by Isaiah with the exception of the shepherd-reference, which is drawn from Psalm 23.

Thus the chapter yields us two visions which are in something of contrast. In the first, verses 1-8, we see the church in her conflict; in the second, verses 9-17, in her victory. In the first, though troubled on every side, she is safe in the larger sense. In the second her troubles are forever ended.

One lingers over the last verses of this chapter, for there are none more beautiful. Who are these who "hunger no more, neither thirst any more," from whose eyes God has wiped every tear? We look at the verses and answer: "Those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb." But there is something just

before that, something inseparably connected with it. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, . . . therefore." Here we have the thought, of which the Bible is full, but which is so thoroughly unpopular to-day, that trouble may be a blessing in disguise. . . . A great snowstorm descends upon the Atlantic states. Trains come to a standstill. Food grows scarce. A calamity? Not at all. A few thousand commuters are discommoded, business may suffer for a day, but the snow brings elements to the soil worth many times over all the discomfort which is caused. When the fingers are frostbitten pain follows, but the pain is an indication that circulation is being restored.

Suffering always seems to be contrary to the course of nature. As a matter of fact, it is an integral and necessary part of the course of nature. It is natural to suppose that God has formed man for happiness; the fact is that God has formed man for happiness through suffering. At first glance all in the scheme of things tends apparently toward complete freedom and full development, while grief and pain and broken plans seem an intrusion, a frustration, a fatal interruption, a partial if not complete, defeat. It requires a long time for some of us to learn the simple, inescapable truth, that there are two tendencies in God's world, one working toward liberty, the other toward restraint, and that no one grows to man's full estate without the ministration of suffering. You may rear an orchid or a clinging vine in a conservatory, but a white oak or a Norway pine would die in an atmosphere like that. Their life depends upon exposure. Give them the skies, the winds of heaven in their branches, the storms that test, the frosts that blast, and they will live and become things

of beauty and a joy forever. In the grace, and by the strength of God we must face life. We must confront it with all its trouble, with all its tempest, all its sorrow, and give it challenge. Robert Frost says, speaking of the "literature of escape," "The only way to escape anything in this world is to grab it by the throat."

"Do you fear the force of the wind,
The slash of the rain?
Go face them and fight them,
Be savage again.
Go hungry and cold like the wolf,
Go wade like the crane:
The palms of your hands will thicken,
The skin of your cheek will tan,
You'll grow ragged and weary and swarthy,
But you'll walk like a man."[1]

Spiritual completeness, like physical perfection, can never be reached without cost. Michael Angelo used to say, when the chippings flew thick from the block on the floor of the studio, "While the marble wastes the image grows." As the cloud, which has flashed its angry lightnings and poured its desolating showers retreats, fringed with gold and crimson and spanned with the rainbow of God's promise, so do the griefs which have weighed heaviest and been most cheerless, glow with divine radiance and beauty when they lie upon the horizon of the past. "These are they which came out of great tribulation, . . . therefore are they before the throne of God."

[1] Hamlin Garland. Used by permission of author.

## Chapter XVI

# ONE SEAL AND FOUR TRUMPETS

### Revelation 8

IN considering chapter seven we found it to be a parenthesis or interlude between the breaking of the sixth seal of the roll which contained the divine decrees for the future, and the breaking of the seventh seal. Chapter eight and several chapters following present the disclosures made when the seventh seal is broken. Some critics hold that the disclosures of the seventh seal extend to the middle of chapter eleven, others consider that they extend to the middle of chapter sixteen. Chapter eight, like all the other chapters of the book, yields us now the charm of the unfamiliar and the unexpected.

Verse 1. "Half an hour." Why just this measure of time is mentioned we do not know, nor can we even conjecture. But "silence" suggests the wistful, or alarmed, uncertainty with which the end of the silence is awaited. It is the lull before the storm, a stillness big with fate, a keen, perhaps trembling suspense. The lightnings and thunders and tempest-voices cease, the music of the choruses of praise is hushed. Heaven and earth hold their breath awaiting the judgment of the Lord—a dramatic pause which heightens the effect of that which is to follow.

Verse 2. "Seven angels." Not merely any seven who happen to be standing before the throne, but a special seven distinguished above the others. The idea is probably suggested by the words of Tobit: "I am

Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and go in before the glory of the Holy one." "Trumpets." Often spoken of in both Testaments in connection with judgments. Paul: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump."

Verse 3. "Offer." The idea of angels assisting or supporting the prayers of the saints is common in later Jewish thought, but that is not the idea expressed here. Rather, the prayers are made pleasant to God by the incense, not by the offerer. The prayers are direct, unassisted. If assisted, it is by Christ, the one Mediator between God and man. These prayers are now acceptable in the sense that the time has arrived when it is possible to answer them.

Verse 5. The angel now makes another use of the censer. In Ezekiel 10. 2 we read of the command given to an angel to fill both his hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim and to scatter them over the city. The meaning is similar both in Ezekiel and here in Revelation. In answer to the prayers of his suffering people the fire of God is to descend upon their persecutors on earth. . . . And now the silence is broken by "voices, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake," precursors of the judgments to follow.

Verse 6. As before we had seven seals, now we are to have seven trumpets. Like the seven seals the trumpets are divided into a group of four, then of three. Four affect nature in various ways; three affect mankind directly. There is a connection, somewhat indefinite and irregular, between the woes of the trumpets and the plagues of Egypt. It should be noted that, while God's wrath is emphasized, it is made clear that a purpose of

mercy runs through all. *a.* In the conception of the writer our Lord's word, "The gospel must first be preached to all nations," is now fulfilled. Those affected by the judgments are those who have refused to accept the offer of mercy. *b.* The conversion of these is still the aim of the judgments, and a possibility of repentance as a result of judgment is implied. Always the rainbow of mercy is round about the throne of condemnation.

Verse 7. "Third part." Terrible and destructive as it is, the judgment is still partial. "All green grass," that is, all the grass of the "third part." This prediction is influenced by the plague of hail in Exodus.

Verses 8, 9. "Mountain . . . fire." A volcano in active eruption cast into the sea. (What a figure!) "Blood." Suggested by the plague of blood in Exodus.

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### SERMON OUTLINE

"Prayers . . . upon the golden altar" (Revelation 8. 3).

Invariably in these chapters, filled as they are with much that is strange and weird and foreign to our thought, there is a passage which is full of beauty and meaning for us. So it is here in verse three. In the midst of fury and terror here is gentleness. However other verses may bewilder us here we are at home, for we are led into the realm of prayer.

Religion without prayer is meaningless. If there is no way to come into communication with the Father of our spirits, we are no better than spiritual orphans. If our petitions have no impact or effect upon his will,

then the word "Father," so often on Jesus' lips, is vanity and emptiness.

But the way of prayer is often a way of disappointment. Sometimes the answer is in the negative, and, since we are only human, having no infinite knowledge, we cannot understand. Could we see all the facts and considerations which enter into that "No," we should say that His way is true and righteous altogether.

Sometimes we try to dictate to God and the result is disappointment. We are forgetting the example of Jesus under the olive trees—"Not my will, but thine be done." Chinese Gordon was a giant in prayer. In his Egyptian campaign he said he "prayed his boats up the Nile." But he also wrote this: "I think all prayers for temporalities must be made in subjection to God's will, with this reservation—if it falls in with his great scheme. The person who prays must be ready to have his request denied if it runs counter to God's rule which is dictated by infinite wisdom."

Sometimes our prayers are answered in such strange and unexpected ways that we are too blind to see that the answer has been made. Paul speaks of his thorn in the flesh, which was undoubtedly some physical affliction. He prayed to God to remove it. It was not removed. The answer was, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Without the thorn you might become unduly exalted. My power is made perfect in your weakness. Paul understood that his prayer was answered, answered in a strange way which seemed the way of complete denial which, in a sense, it was. But the reply carried with it something better than an affirmative. He had prayed for strength, but God said: "Keep your weakness. That is your real strength." And when Paul

understands, he responds: "Most gladly therefore will I glory in *my* weakness, that the *power* of *Christ* may rest upon me." The instance of Augustine and his mother, Monica, is a familiar one. Monica had prayed all night by the seaside that God would not allow her son to sail for Italy. He was a wild boy and she could not bring herself to give him up to be surrounded by the temptations of a foreign land. But even while she prayed he sailed away—and in Italy became a Christian! And Augustine writes in his *Confessions:* "Thou, in the depth of thy counsels, hearing the main point of her desire, regardest not what she *then asked,* that thou mightest make me what she *ever desired.*"

But our text reminds us, specifically, that some of our prayers seem unanswered simply because we haven't given God time enough. It tells us of prayers, not dead, but waiting before the throne of God until the "fullness of time" makes reply possible. In our thought, the matter of deferred answers to our petitions is given too little place. Sometimes the answer is deferred because we are not ready for it. When James and John came to Jesus asking that they might have the places of honor at his right hand and his left in his kingdom, their very naïveté shows how ill prepared they were for an affirmative reply. They had not yet grasped the essentials of that kingdom. They were strangers to that humility without which no man may enter it. They had felt no testing fires. They were children asking they knew not what. The request was not denied. The answer was deferred. Long since the "sons of thunder" took their place among the illustrious in that Commonwealth which they had so little understood.

Sometimes the answer is deferred because God is not

ready to give it. Someone has said that every great ruler is an opportunist. In its original sense the word carried no uncomplimentary meaning. It signified one who waited outside a harbor—opposite a port—until wind and tide made entrance possible. Lord Cromer compared the skilled statesman to a man in a boat waiting to cross in security the bar of an Australian tidal river. Public men have always had to wait for the fit occasion. Abraham Lincoln frequently had to delay or change his plans. He deferred the Emancipation Proclamation until a Union victory would insure popular approval. Wellington remained for days in front of Marmont, in Spain, until the French commander made a false maneuver, enabling the English general to "beat forty thousand men in forty minutes." But God is the Supreme Opportunist. With him a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years. His majestic organization of events in their right time-relations is one of the striking themes of the Bible. When we cry in our impatience "Lord, how long!" the response of timeless wisdom may well be, "Be still and know that I am God."

Sometimes in the nature of the case, prayer must be answered gradually, and because the answer is not complete we do not recognize it as an answer. We pray for the coming of the Kingdom and because the time is long we see no progress toward the desired end. Yet slowly and surely God is working out his eternal purposes of good. Or we pray day by day the psalmist's petition, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Then perhaps we fall before some onset of temptation and all our praying seems empty words. Yet if we persist in that spiritual quest,

while to-day may not bring the response we crave, the long run of the to-morrows will bring with certainty the argosies of Christian character.

And sometimes the answer is not deferred at all. We only think it is, when, as a matter of fact, it is fully and royally answered. Men are always praying, for example, for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. "Open the windows of heaven and pour us out a blessing!" But you will never find a prayer like that in the New Testament. Why? Because the Spirit came in his fullness at Pentecost and he has never gone away. He presses upon us like an atmosphere. He waits for our hearts to open for his incoming.

Unanswered prayer? Never. There is no such thing if it be a right prayer, springing from a right motive. There is a law of conservation of energy, in the spiritual world as in the physical, which precludes the possibility of a lost, annihilated prayer. And perhaps that petition which you have offered so often lies before the throne of God, waiting for his hour, when, with the incense of Christ's intercession, it shall rise into living fulfillment. Perhaps directly, perhaps in a way we cannot dream, perhaps in us rather than for us—somehow, some way, not ours but God's, the promise is fulfilled: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." Therefore "men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

## Chapter XVII

# DEMONIC LOCUSTS: LION-HEAD HORSES

### Revelation 9

VERSE thirteen of the last chapter was the point at which transition was made to the Three Woes of the three last trumpets. The pronouncement of judgment now continues through chapter nine.

Verse 1. "Star." A personification. In later Jewish literature stars fallen to earth were often personified in strange fashion. Thus in the book of Enoch: "Moreover, I saw with my eyes, while I slept, and I saw the heaven above, and behold a star fell down from heaven, and when it arose, it fed and browsed among those oxen." "Pit," that is, "abyss." The word has a long history in previous religious writings, but had come, at the time John writes, to mean the abode of the powers of evil.

Verse 2. "Smoke," etc. The meaning may be that the locusts resembled a column of smoke. This judgment corresponds with the eighth plague in Exodus. The most striking description in the Bible of the visitation of locusts is in Joel 2.

Verse 3. To all the powers of destruction which locusts normally possess is added the sting of the scorpion.

Verse 4. These insects have a special function in this vision. Whereas locusts normally prey upon vegetation only, these attack only men. "Men which have not the seal." The one hundred and forty-four thousand of 7. 4 are to be immune.

Verse 5. Not a complete destruction. "Five months." A brief, indefinite period of time.

Verse 6. Compare 6. 16.

Verse 7. "Like unto horses prepared unto battle." This may refer to the scaly armor of the locusts, or to the regularity of their advance, or both. There is a saying among the Arabs to the effect that the locust has a head like a horse, a breast like a lion, feet like a camel, a body like a serpent, and antennæ like the hair of a maiden. The Italian name for the locust is cavalletta—"little horse."

Verse 8. "Teeth of lions," is expressive of the voracity of locusts in devouring vegetation.

Verse 11. "Name in the Hebrew." A usage characteristic of the fourth Gospel. "Abaddon," that is, destruction personified. Translated "Apollyon" in the Septuagint Version. It is possible that "Apollyon" here is an allusion to Apollo. The locust was one of the symbols of his cult.

Verse 12. The woe just ended differs from the others in that there is no account of the carrying out of the judgment pronounced.

Verse 13. "Altar." It is the altar of 8. 3. Four voices from the four corners respond to the prayers of the saints.

Verse 14. "Loose," etc. This is the only case where one of the seven angels is called to do anything but to sound the trumpet. "Great river." The common designation for the Euphrates. In the Old Testament we find "Euphrates" often omitted, simply "Great river" being used. It was the principal stream of Babylonia and Assyria and formed a boundary between these nations and the Roman territory. Thus it was natural

to expect judgments in the form of invasions from that quarter. Later Jewish writings indicate that Rome was in fear of an invasion of the Parthians at this time.

Verse 15. An appointed hour in the plan of God is here made emphatic. It was a cardinal tenet of apocalyptic writers that God has a fixed, definite hour for every event. So also in the fourth Gospel.

Verse 16. "Two hundred thousand thousand." An innumerable host. The Parthian strength was chiefly in their cavalry.

Verse 17. "Of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone." Colors which were fiery red, smoky blue, and sulphurous yellow. Is this an army of men? Or of demons? Or men imaginatively changed into the appearance of demons? John was thinking of judgments inflicted by both demons and men, so the figures intermingle.

Verse 19. The Parthians bound their horses tails into a point. They also had great skill in shooting arrows as they turned and fled. From these facts John constructs his fanciful description.

Verses 20, 21, form a kind of epilogue to the visions of the first six trumpets. The judgments apply to unbelievers only.

### SERMON OUTLINE

"And the rest of the men repented not" (Revelation 9. 20).

1. God never lets a bad man alone. He loves even bad men too much for that. That is why the Bible is one long urge to repentance. Moses calls upon the people to repent. The prophets cry, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" John the Baptist comes out of the desert, wild, uncouth, demanding repentance.

In the teaching of Jesus himself the call is frequent. "I come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." When John the Baptist's ministry ends because John is cast into prison, we read: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Just before he vanished for the last time he said: "Thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sin should be preached among all nations beginning at Jerusalem." In his great Pentecostal sermon, Peter says: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you. . . . Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Paul on Mars' Hill declared that, if there had once been a time when God condoned sin on account of man's ignorance, that time is now past; "Now [he] commandeth all men everywhere to repent." He declares that the goodness of God leadeth men to repentance; that godly sorrow worketh repentance. The writer of Hebrews speaks of Esau who found no place for repentance though he sought it bitterly with tears. In Revelation not one, but eleven times, there sounds the ringing call for repentance. The Bible is a radical book in that it calls for radical changes in human character; and it makes clear beyond all peradventure that God's first and fundamental and essential requirement in changing a bad man into a good man is that the man shall repent.

2. God never lets a bad man alone. He loves even bad men too much for that. He works upon them in divers ways. Seldom by frontal attack. Almost always by a divine indirection.

*a.* Sometimes he approaches through the intellect.

He spreads abroad the heavens; marshals sun, moon, and stars in procession, breaks courses for his Mississippis and his Yukons, places bounds for his Atlantics and Pacifics, shoulders his Rockies and Sierras to the skies, until the question forces itself upon the mind, Whence came all these things? Napoleon hears a group of his officers on shipboard calling themselves atheists. He pauses in his pacing of the deck to point to the stars and ask "Who made all those?" And the question is even more pertinent to-day as man pushes his telescopes to galaxies five hundred million light years away. Again God approaches the intellect through Scripture, challenging men to account for its profound wisdom, its august mysteries, if there be no God who has inspired it. He approaches the mind through Christ who said "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind,' challenging the world to account for him without taking rational account of the God within him. And when the mind acknowledges God in nature, in Scripture, in Christ, it suddenly becomes aware that he is not an abstract fact. If he be God, then in the very nature of the case he is One who demands a moral response—the response of repentance and belief.

*b.* Sometimes he approaches through the affections. The heart of mankind is sore and bruised. It has journeyed into a far country. It has been wronged. It has done wrong. It is lacerated and soiled. Can God forgive? Yes, God will forgive. God will rejoice to forgive if man repents. Socrates said, "Perhaps God can forgive sin, but I do not see how." This Gospel tells us how. It speaks to the heart, telling the story of redemption by a Redeemer who gave his full meas-

ure of devotion upon a cross, that God might forgive all men who repent and put their trust in him.

*c.* Sometimes the approach is through the conscience. The devil says: "Sin is natural and right." Conscience says: "Sin is unnatural, a monstrosity, and wrong." The devil says: "Duty is a joke." Conscience says: "Duty is a serious affair, and the man who regards it as a joke is a joke himself." The great men of the Roman Empire, living at a time which touches our book of Revelation so closely, bowed before the pagan gods even while they detested them, and whispered to themselves, "We must not be like these." And Rousseau commenting says, "The voice of conscience, stronger than that of the gods themselves, made itself heard and respected and obeyed on the earth, and seemed to banish guilt and the guilty to the very limits of heaven." Does God approach man through conscience, asking for repentance? Ask the shade of Belshazzar who saw in letters of fire upon the wall of his banqueting hall, "Thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting." Ask Herod who had had John the Baptist put to death, and thought, when he heard of Jesus and his miracles, that the ghost of John had returned to trouble him. Ask Judas, throwing down his thirty pieces of silver and going out to suicide in the field Aceldama. Every unrepentant man hears at times a voice of accusation. And blended with it a voice which says, "Repent."

*d.* Sometimes the approach is through the memory. It was the memory of a father's house that turned the prodigal from the husks and the swine to weep: "I have sinned against heaven and against thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." And so it has been with myriad prodigals ever since.

*e*. Sometimes the approach is through the imagination. That is why Jesus spoke of himself as a shepherd. As light. As bread. As water of life. That is why John in the Revelation unleashes a divinely inspired imagination which, in terms of thunder and lightning, and volcanoes thrown into the sea, and crashing earthquakes and reverberating choruses of praise portrays the majesty of God, the certainty of judgment, the glory of Redemption, and the necessity for repentance.

3. God never lets an unrepentant man alone. He loves even unrepentant men too much for that. And that is why, *when all else fails,* he appeals to the motive of fear. He reminds us firmly that his universe is under moral law as surely as it is under the law of gravitation. Bad men may fool themselves. They cannot fool God. There is a homely proverb which runs, "He who spits against the wind spits in his own face." Bad men only bruise themselves when they charge against the buckler of the Almighty's purpose. Ancient Israel heard God say through the mouths of his prophets that a nation choosing dishonesty, impurity, and irreverence would perish. But Israel would not listen to the warnings of love. The Levitical priests declared: "If ye do evil, the Lord shall scatter you among all people, from the one end of the earth, even unto the other end. Wherever scattered, you shall find no ease, neither shall the sole of your foot have rest. The tender and delicate women among you shall eat her own children for want of all things, secretly in the siege and straitness wherewith your enemy shall distress you in your gates. You shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations whither the Lord shall lead you." But Israel would not listen. Still the word of the Lord

cannot be broken, and that prediction was literally fulfilled. Israel was scattered from her little corner into every part of the earth. Israel was disliked by other nations and found no rest for the sole of her foot. In famine she has eaten her own children. And to this day the Jewish race is an "astonishment" constantly viewed with surprise, and a "byword" often mentioned with contempt.

Nor has it ever paid for an individual to go contrary to God's will. Always it spells disaster. And that is why God never lets an unrepentant man alone. He loves even unrepentant men too much for that. . . . And this brings us again to the closing verses of our chapter and to our text. "And the rest of them repented not." This book, after all other appeals are fruitless, does not hesitate to appeal to self-interest and fear. But running through all its severity, its fearsome imagery, its wailing prophecies of woes to come, is the divine purpose of love. The love which will not let an unrepentant man alone. Which chastises, in mercy. A book of terrors? Perhaps it is. But is far more than that. It is a many-sided book. And in one of its vital aspects is a commentary and enforcement in extenso of the word of Ezekiel the prophet: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

## Chapter XVIII

# SEVEN SECRET THUNDERS; TWO STRANGE WITNESSES

### Revelation 10 to 11. 13

THIS passage is an interlude in accordance with the Johannine custom of the dramatic pause before the climax. As in the seventh chapter, between the sixth and the seventh seals there was a parenthesis, so here, between the sixth and seventh trumpets.

Verse 1. An angel with all the appurtenances of heavenly glory.

Verse 2. "A little book." In contrast to the great roll of chapter eight.

Verse 3. A cry of warning against the divine wrath.

Verse 4. What the thunders uttered we do not know. Why they were to be "sealed up" we can only conjecture.

Verse 5. "Lifted up his hand." A common gesture in taking an oath.

Verse 6. "That there should be time no longer." The meaning may be that time ceases, but, more probably, that there is to be no more delay. The saint's "Lord, how long?" is now to be answered in the days ushered in by the seventh trumpet blast which will be presented after this interlude passage.

Verse 7. "Days." The action corresponding to each trumpet blast is conceived of as extending over a period of time. "Mystery." The common designation of any plan of God not yet consummated. The plan

here is the salvation of God's people, the consummation of the Kingdom. All things will be made clear to those who question the meaning of events which have involved suffering and death. This finishing of the "mystery" is in striking parallel with Christ's declaration in John 16. 23: "In that day ye shall ask me nothing," that is, there will be no questions for you to ask. "Declared." Literally, declared good tidings. "Servants and prophets," both of the Old Testament and the New.

Verse 8. The same voice as in verse 4. The voice of the Son of man.

Verse 9. "Book." The book is the command of God urging John on to his prophetic work in view of the momentous issues now at hand. "Sweet, bitter." The honor of being a prophet of the Most High would be sweet; the task of declaring judgment might often be bitter to a true prophet, for the true prophet is full of tenderness and compassion.

Chapter 11, verse 1. Here begins the second part of the interlude. "Measure" has nothing to do with dimensions. It is a symbol of protection, a command to mark out lines at Jerusalem which an attacking enemy may not cross. This is the only interpretation—and there are many—which is consistent with the phrase "them that worship."

Verse 2. "Given to the Gentiles." Compare Luke 21. 24. Jerusalem is to be destroyed, but the "holy place," that is, the place, or persons, of God's own shall escape. "Forty and two months." That is, three and a half years, an indefinite, symbolic period. "Three and a half," half of seven, the perfection number, is used whether of days, or years, to describe a stormy,

restless time—a time of suspense or danger. Compare verses 9 and 11.

Verse 3. "Two witnesses." Hundreds of pages have been written with the object of explaining their identity, but it cannot be determined positively in the light of our present knowledge. Quite possibly the reference is to Moses and Elijah, as named in the transfiguration scene. The name "Elijah" appears in a somewhat similar passage in Malachi (4. 5). "Sackcloth" indicates the character of their witness, that of repentance. They will be emissaries of judgment for three and a half years, corresponding to the period of heathen domination in verse 2.

Verse 4. An obscure reference to Zechariah 4. In Zechariah's vision two olive trees gave oil to the sacred candelabra through golden pipes. There the two are supposed to refer to Zerubbabel, head of the priestly order, and to Josiah, head of the civil order.

Verse 5. The language probably shows the influence of 2 Kings 1. 10.

Verse 6. The power of the two is like that of Moses in the case of the plagues.

Verse 7. They will be preserved until they have finished their work of testimony, then martyred. "Beast." Used often of the Roman emperor, but here, and elsewhere, of a demonic being with supernatural powers.

Verse 8. Denial of burial was the supreme act of indignity. Burial, among the Jews of the time, was invariably upon the day of death. A period of "three days and a half" (verse 9) would be very long indeed—an indignity beyond speech.

Verses 11, 12. The martyrdom and ignominious treat-

ment would be followed by triumphant vindication.

Verses 13. The result of this judgment is in striking contrast to that of many others in the book. Those who escaped were converted, "and gave glory to the God of heaven." There was a widespread belief in the early church that the Jews would accept Christ before the final judgment of the world.

### SERMON OUTLINE

Chapter 10. 1 to 11. 13.

As we have seen, the whole passage is an interlude. It leads to the thought of interludes in human life.

Now, if we have a pessimistic view of life we shall conclude that it is mostly made up of trials, sorrows, difficulties. Sir Walter Raleigh, toward the end of his sorely tried life, wrote:

> "Even such is Time that takes in trust
> Our youth, our joys and all we have,
> And pays us back with earth and dust."

There is truth in that beyond a doubt. But the fact is that between our troubles, desperate as they may be, there are long periods when trouble stays its hand. In fact, if we are honest with ourselves, we find that the easy road is longer than the hill road, and the good and the pleasant outweigh, many times over, the disagreeable, the painful, and the tragic.

But this interlude in Revelation has a special and peculiar characteristic. Its purpose seems to have been, primarily, to strengthen John for his Christian life and his specific Christian work. It is worthwhile to notice this because: *a.* It seems to have escaped all the scholars and commentators. *b.* Because the chapter as a

whole is so involved and difficult that we fail to recognize at once what these revelations must have done for John. *c.* Because the chapter is of such a nature that we would never turn to it for help in our own difficulties unless the elements of strength in it, for Christian life and service, were pointed out to us. How, then, did it help John?

1. He sees a mighty angel, clothed with a cloud; a halo like a rainbow about his head; face shining as the sun; bestriding land and sea with feet and legs like pillars of brass. He is the messenger of God, the angel who has contact with God, who takes continents and oceans in his stride. Now, the *accessories* of a messenger in ancient times were always a sure indication of the dignity and power of the potentate who sent him. And so John caught a new glimpse of the God whom he served. He saw the Lord God Omnipotent, ruler of heaven and earth, yet the God whose one best name was Love. It was from the messenger of this God that John took his orders. And it was by the character of this messenger that he was reminded afresh of the majesty and tenderness of that One whom he was to serve, and by whose strength he would be upheld.

2. There were revealed to John certain things which he was not to tell. "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not." What does that mean? It may mean this: "John, if what you tell is to mean greatly, there must be certain things within you which are more and greater than the things you utter. You must store up special reserves. There must be more in the reservoir than ever goes through the aqueduct if your spiritual water system is to suffice for the time of drought." Even in the vexed turmoil of

this stupendous book John is recalled to the simple truth that a man's life, if it is to have power, must exceed his utterance, and that a mere hand-to-mouth spiritual existence is narrow, shallow, and doomed to failure.

3. John is told with all plainness that in his Christian life he must take the bitter with the sweet. It was a high honor, a sweet thing, to be the prophet of God, the apostle of Christ. But that was not the whole story. He must denounce the sins of men; the blindness of the unrepentant Jews who denied Jesus' Messiahship; the iniquities of the Roman government; and disclose the trials which would befall the righteous. It is so with us. It is sweet to know ourselves disciples and companions of Christ; but if we are minded to stand foursquare, through evil and through good report; to do the right though the heavens fall, the sanctities of the communion table will lead us straight to self-denials, to reproaches, to being shunned in certain groups because we are different. The world does not always react pleasantly to a Christ-like life. The conscientious objector in any field is in for a bad time. Goodness will be appreciated by many. It will be scorned by some. Christ knew. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Excellence exasperates. Victor Hugo said: "Truly, all success in this world is a crime and must be expiated." An old fable tells us that when Solomon bestowed gifts upon the birds, the hoopoes received golden crowns and flew away proud and happy in their distinction. But their brethren were jealous, and men hunted the hoopoes for their skins and plumage. Then in fear for their lives they returned to Solomon and asked him to take away the distinction

which had become intolerable. So he deprived them of their adornments and gave them crests of buff feathers tipped with black, whereupon they went away rejoicing. Any splash of gold or purple excellence awakens the enmity of the commonplace. The human bird of prey hates the man who prays. And while it is a sweet and glorious thing to be a servant of God, there are times when it is bitterly inconvenient.

4. Again, in this interlude John is reassured concerning the final triumph of righteousness. Throughout the book it is the Jew who rejects Christ, who denounces the Christian, brings him before magistrates, sends him to death. All through the Letters to the Seven Churches we found instances of this. But the interlude tells John this will not continue forever. It says there will come a day when the men of Jerusalem will yield to the truth of the Christian gospel. It would be to John a marvelous, all but incredible, promise. No promise could have heartened and encouraged him so much. If that were possible, then all things were possible with God. If the Jews, who had sent Christ to his death and were out to crucify every Christian could be reconciled to God, then every other religious problem seemed simple by comparison. And John could carry on in quenchless faith, undying hope, and with inflexible purpose.

Surely, an interlude like this, a quiet place of reassurance in the vast, weird, thunderous tumult of the book is worth while. It must have been indescribably precious to Saint John. And it has lessons for us which we may not overlook.

1. It tells us that this God whom we worship is omnipotent power and perfect love.

2. It bids us lay up, in hours of worship and meditation, great truths which form the background of life, the subsoil, the rich subconsciousness of the soul. Sometimes we go to church and come away disappointed. We say: What did I get that will help me to-morrow? Maybe nothing. But perhaps we received something vastly greater than anything we could use to-morrow. There will be many days when a boy in college will get nothing he can use to-morrow. But does that mean education is useless? Hardly. Perhaps in the church service there was something which lodged deep in the consciousness through no effort of our own; perhaps when its value becomes apparent to us we shall have forgotten where it came from. "Seal up the voices of the seven thunders," was the command to John. They are not for the world now. They are not of any apparent use to you at the moment. They are to be kept like the leaven in the meal. They are a contribution to the inarticulate inwardness of life. They are the unconscious elements in your growth; the strong, invisible, inaudible molders of your character and personality.

3. It tells of days when faith, which was sweet in the mouth, may be bitter in the belly; of days when faith seems empty; when doubts assail and temptations yielded to bring the bitterness of remorse. If Peter could have heard that word, he would have understood. His faith was a glory one day. Another day it was a bitterness of regret because he had betrayed his Lord, and on another day it was a heartbreak of bitterness when he and all the twelve believed their Lord was dead. Our Saviour's own life was a mixture of sweet and bitter. It was sweet to heal the sick, to preach on

a mountainside among the lilies, to be loved in the house of Bethlehem. But Gethsemane was bitter, and the cross more bitter. Sweet, bitter. It was the path the Master trod. Shall not the servant tread it still? And the fact that it is not all easy is one of the proofs of its divine validity.

4. And that note which sounds the final triumph of righteousness—do we not all need that? Any man who thinks will sometimes pose the question: Is the world growing better? Will the good win out? He longs for an affirmative answer. He will see material progress in plenty; he will see intellectual progress in plenty. He will see something of social progress, of religious progress, but is it enough upon which to base a conviction of optimism as to the final triumph of goodness in the universe God has made? In every generation men say:

> "The new age stands as yet
> Half built against the sky,
> Open to every threat
> Of storms that clamor by;
> Scaffolding veils the walls,
> And dim dust floats and falls,
> As moving to and fro, their tasks the masons ply."

Will any age ever stand completely builded, a palace fair, symmetrical, against the skies of Time? There is but one place to find the answer to that question. It is in the place where John in this interlude finds it. It is in a world beyond the world we know. This does not mean that we are not to work for a better world here and now. Life loses all its meaning if we fail to do that. But the mark of the transitory is upon everything

earthly. The completed palace lies in the land of the immortal hope where time shall be no more. Will it ever be builded even there? Yes. Because God is God, and he will not fail in that to which he has set his hand. "Then the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Then shall we be "like them that dream, . . . our mouth . . . filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing." "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." And the eternal world shall be like him, for he has made and founded it upon the ruins of the world we know, utilizing the elements which have here shown their fitness for his eternal purpose. This is our final faith in

> "That God, which ever lives and loves,
> One God, one law, one element,
> And one far-off divine event
> To which the whole creation moves."

## Chapter XIX

## AND HE SHALL REIGN

### Revelation 11. 14-19

VERSE fourteen is a connecting link between the extended interlude which precedes it and the passage which is to follow.

Verse 15. This is not a proclamation of an *immediate* final Judgment. That Judgment will come in the days of the seventh trumpet, that is, in the period introduced by the seventh trumpet. But that period may be a very long one, occupying centuries, though probably John did not so conceive it. But however long the time, in the end God's sovereign rule will be established and the prince of this world cast out, for the power of every enemy of God is temporary. "And he shall reign," etc. The weight of opinion is to the effect that God the Father is indicated by "he," but we cannot be certain. If the reference to God the Father be correct, a joint sovereignty is indicated by the words "and of his Christ." Between the rank of the Father and that of the Son John draws no distinction.

Verse 16. Compare 4. 4.

Verse 17. The attributes of Deity are eternity and omnipotence. These are directly related to the act here celebrated, namely, the accomplishment of God's eternally planned purpose for his kingdom. Power which is conceived of as having for long been in the hands of Satan is now taken into the hands of the Father. The verse is in the spirit of Psalms 97, 98.

Verse 18. "Unto thy servants the prophets," etc., is intended to comprehend inclusively the whole Church of Christ.

Verse 19. This verse is a response in action to verse 18. "The ark of his testament." The scene portrayed in chapter 4 has been replaced by that which symbolizes its purport, namely, the temple of God's presence and the ark of his covenant mercy. There was a Jewish tradition which taught that, when the first Temple was destroyed, the ark was carried away to a place of safety by Jeremiah, and would be restored when Messiah should appear.

### SERMON OUTLINE

"And that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants, . . . and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth" (Revelation 11. 18).

In this verse there are two ideas which open a large subject. "That thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants, . . . and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth." These phrases suggest the theme: Rewards and Punishments.

1. Suppose we take up the unpleasant matter of punishment first and get it out of the way. "And shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth." Whatever we think about punishment, there seems to be rude justice in that. It is punishment which vindicates itself. Those who persist incorrigibly in destroying the earth must, in the nature of the case, be destroyed. That which ruins the social order must be eliminated. Four men, let us say, are adrift in a boat at sea. There is only a limited supply of drinking water. If the four are to be saved, all must conform to a careful ration. If one

drinks all, all will be lost. To one who steals and drinks more than his share, swift punishment must be meted out. He will be tied up, or beaten, and for a time his share will be withdrawn. If these measures do not avail to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, he will be dropped quietly over the side. However sentimental we may be, in such a case our heads will be harder than our hearts, and we shall say: "Yes, the man had to be punished. He acted antisocially. He sinned against the tiny social order which is represented at the moment by four men adrift in an open boat at sea."

Now, when we admit that much, we have admitted a significant but essentially simple fact. We are literally all in the same boat as members of human society. Multiply four by a million or a hundred million and you have the world in which we live. We all stand in certain vital relations to each other. If we violate the sanctity of these relations, we endanger, or at least damage to a certain extent, the life of the whole group. Why does a man kill a rattlesnake? Because it is a menace to human life. Why do we punish a murderer? Because he is a menace to social life. If everyone were at liberty to kill anyone he thought ought to be killed, society would cease to be, and anarchy would ensue. The social sanctions which demand punishment for crime are based upon a presumption, not always clear, but usually fundamentally sound, that such sanctions are necessary, for the safe, orderly, and happy life of society-at-large. Here our deepest instincts are in harmony with the teaching of Scripture—Scripture which includes the teaching of Christ—that sin, in whatever form, demands punishment. For all sin is antisocial. We feel the essential rightness, the undebatable just-

ness of the words: "And shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth."

But we cannot think of punishment without some consideration of its purpose. What is the end which punishment has in view? *a.* First, there is a punishment which is simple retribution; punishment which, in a sense, is nothing more or less than revenge. If, on a public playground, one boy throws a stone and hits another boy's sister, the brother of that sister, without any theories of punishment whatsoever, will, if he can, hit the other boy on the nose. That is retribution. You may not like the idea of retributive punishment. You may not approve of it at all. You may say that all punishment should have reform as its object and nothing else. But you cannot find your concept in Scripture. Scripture makes a place for purely retributive punishment. Our Lord says there are sins which may never be forgiven, because the sinner has reached a state of soul where repentance is impossible. But these sins are to be punished, although, in the nature of the case, there can be no possibility of reform.

*b.* But more and more this form of punishment becomes repugnant to us. More and more we emphasize the reformative element. As long as there is any hope of an offender's restoration to decency, punishment should be directed solely to that end. And we may be sure we are divinely right in this because we are taught everywhere in the Bible that salvation, restoration, is God's deepest thought for mankind. "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

2. And now to the more pleasant thought of reward. "That thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants."

Often in a Bible teachers' meeting the question of prizes is discussed. There are usually two schools of thought. The older school approves of prizes. The younger disapproves because modern pedagogy frowns upon the practice, especially above the kindergarten and primary grades. Doubtless it would be best to induce everyone, grown-ups included, to do their duty without hope of recompense—if you could do it. But our Lord, knowing human nature so intimately well, did not hesitate to make concessions here. He made the hope of reward a stimulus to zeal. He promised rewards in heaven but he also promised rewards on earth. "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold, now in this time." Paul follows the Master's example in his teaching. "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." "If any man's work abide, . . . he shall receive a reward." "For if I do this thing [preaching] willingly, I have a reward." The author of Hebrews would have us know that God is a "rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Yet while Jesus and Paul make this concession to human nature, there is nothing in their teaching which need prevent us from going on to a higher standard, a standard under which we do our duty because it is our duty. That this is the true standard our Lord implies in the great Judgment scene of Matthew 25. "When saw we thee an hungered?" What had been done, had been done with no hope of reward. They were not aware that they had done anything worthy of reward. They are outstanding instances of unconscious goodness, and to them, never dreaming of reward, is given

the highest reward of all: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Rewards and Punishments. From our text there come to us five lessons.

*a.* Sin will be punished. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

*b.* Punishment should be reformative. If the subject will not reform, punishment can be only retributive.

*c.* The hope of reward is a legitimate motive. Christ says so. It keeps its place in the Christian scheme as Paul unfolds it. We need not try to do without it, even while we pass on to higher motives and nobler conceptions of duty.

*d.* There are motives which are higher. There is the reward of *character.* A man, if he is wise, will try to live in the sphere of the spirit, without thought of recompense. He will pursue righteousness for its own sake. He will be upright, brave and true, because these qualities constitute a worthy soul. . . . There is the reward of *knowing* that we *serve God* and our fellow men. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." "Those that thou gavest me I have kept and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition." (Judas was destroyed because he sought to destroy the world.) Christ's ultimate motive was doing the will of God in the service of men. It led him to Calvary, but he never hesitated or drew back. And we may never call that a small, or vague, or impossible motive which was made the pattern life for humanity —the life of the Son of man.

*e.* And always, whether there be visible reward, or

invisible reward, or no perceptible reward of any kind at all, Christian labor and Christian sacrifice are not in vain.

"Say not the struggle naught availeth—
For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

"And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light;
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly!
But westward, look, the land is bright!"

"And that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth."

## Chapter XX

# THE CHURCH-BORN CHRIST; HIS MOTHER; AND THE DRAGON

### Revelation 12

THE Trumpet Series of visions has come to an end with chapter eleven. The Vial, or Bowl Series, will begin with chapter fifteen. Chapters twelve, thirteen, and fourteen form the third important parenthesis of the book. In chapters twelve and thirteen we are shown three great enemies of the church, the first of them, the "dragon," appearing now in chapter twelve.

Verses 1, 2. A woman is revealed completely enveloped in light. Who is the woman? What does she symbolize? In one sense or another she stands for the church in its widest conception. Not the Jewish Church of the Old Testament alone, nor the Christian Church alone, but both. Who, then, is the "child"? Christ. We naturally respond, "Christ is not born of the church; the church is born of Christ." That is quite true if we think only of the Christian Church; but in a real sense Christ was born of the Jewish Church. He was the flower of the chosen family; as concerning the flesh he was the child of Israel.

Verses 3, 4. "Dragon." That is, Satan. "Great" in power. "Red," the color of blood, because he slays men. "Horns" and "crowns" upon the head indicate Satan's great power and authority. "Third part" indicates that, in the writer's imagination, Satan's power is sufficient to drag down part of heaven itself. "Standing

to devour." So Pharaoh stood before the children of Israel. Pharaoh is referred to in Ezekiel 29. 3 as the dragon. So Herod stood before the Holy Family. The "dragon" here is neither Pharaoh nor Herod, but it is highly probable that these kings were in John's mind, coloring his language.

Verse 5. "Caught up unto God." He was placed under the divine protection not only that he might be safe, but that from heaven, with all divine authority, he might in due time destroy the dragon who had sought to destroy him.

Verse 6. The "woman," that is, the church, is also under divine protection.

Verses 7, 8, 9. A scene of war in heaven between the good and the evil. How did evil get into heaven? A mystery quite like the mystery of the entrance of evil upon the earth. Always in Jewish tradition, Michael is captain of the hosts of the Lord, and guardian of the treasures of heaven. "Old serpent." An allusion to the story of the Fall. "Called the Devil, and Satan." " 'The Devil,' as a name for the evil one, does not appear in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament from Matthew 4. 1 and on. On the other hand, 'Satan,' the 'accuser' (see especially Zechariah 3. 1, 2), is so named both in Job *passim* and in Psalm 109. 6. In the New Testament the latter word has not wholly lost its etymological meaning, and once at least stands for 'slanderer'; see 1 Timothy 3. 6. . . . The threefold description gathers up the primitive, the prophetic, and the New-Testament conception of the supreme Power of Evil" (C. A. Scott).

Verses 10, 12. The victory is followed by a hymn of thanksgiving. Satan had deceived the whole world,

and was, therefore, in a sense, the Prince of this world. He is now shorn of his power in the prophet's vision of the future. Compare John 12. 31; 16. 8, 11.

Verses 13, 14. Satan, cast out, is roused to greater fury than ever. He attacks the "woman," that is, the church, but she is kept safe. An "eagle," that is, God, bears her away to safety on his wings. (The eagle as a symbol of God is frequent in the Old Testament.) Verse 14 is an amplification of verse 6. "Time and times and half a time." The whole period of the church militant. Compare comment on 11. 2.

Verses 15, 16. Though the imagery is difficult the thought is fairly plain. The woman-church is protected from overwhelming waters by an opening of the earth which absorbs her. The language is reminiscent of two Old-Testament events, the passage of the Red Sea; and the death of Korah and his followers, who had risen in rebellion against Moses, and who were destroyed by an earthquake (Numbers 16. 32).

Verse 17. "Remnant." A remnant with us means something small. It is not necessarily so in Scripture usage. The reference here is to those who are faithful to the gospel. The remainder.

Thus we have in chapter twelve the discovery of the first of the three great enemies of the church, the Dragon, Satan, and the narrative of his thwarting.

### SERMON OUTLINE

"And the great dragon was cast out" (Revelation 12. 9).

The text yields the theme, The Defeatibility of Evil. Evil can be defeated. When there was war in heaven, Michael, leading the hosts of righteousness, prevailed.

The saints on earth prevail also, in God's good time, over unrighteousness. The powers of evil are always great, but wherever, in the providence of God and the unflinching purpose of men, it is possible to bring the powers of good squarely against the powers of evil, retreat and rout are the portion of the enemy.

So it has been historically. The Roman Empire sought to blot out Christianity, but Christianity conquered the Empire. The corrupt church of the fifteenth century was cleansed and saved by the Reformation. The Protestant Church of the eighteenth century, corrupt and decadent, was revivified by the preaching of the Wesleys. More than once that which we have recently seen in our own city has been repeated. Over and over bad government has had New York by the throat. Over and over men have said there was no hope of any change. Then a determined effort, and the whole picture has been transformed, raising us from our despair, teaching again the lesson of the defeatibility of evil, that no good cause is ever hopeless, that unrighteousness is not invulnerable.

Yet if we were to base our hope upon history and experience alone, we should hardly reach conviction. The evidence is too confused. The good has seemingly been defeated many times. We need deeper foundations for our faith. And these deeper foundations are suggested by the context.

1. There is the statement of verse 16. "The earth helped the woman." It tells us that the mysterious, unseen forces of the universe are on the side of good. It is hard to define these forces. If a materialist had been writing the sentence, he would have said that Fate helped the woman. A scientist would say the

forces of nature helped the woman. A philosopher might say the Cosmos, or the Infinite, helped the woman. John being a poet writes "The earth helped the woman."

So understood, the words are a message to discouraged people. Just now there are three groups of discouraged people who need the message sorely.

*a.* The Prohibitionists. They fought their heroic battle for a hundred years, saw what appeared to be victory, and are now in the blackness of defeat. Yet the unseen forces work in their behalf. Alcohol kills, and the universe is on the side of life. Alcohol wastes, and the universe is on the side of conservation. The earth helped the woman. The tendency of the traffic to hang itself, given enough rope, and the efforts of those who hate this evil will yet bring a lasting victory.

*b.* The Workers Against War. It was thought that the greatest war ever waged would end war. We look abroad now and see the magnitude of that delusion. In spite of the depression, political leaders everywhere go forward increasing armies, navies, air fleets, crushing their peoples under burdens of taxation which are potent causes of rebellion and anarchy. Yes, war is silly, brutal, ghastly, devilish, suicidal. We all know this. And because we know it we also know that boys by the million will not be slaughtered forever. The doom of war is spelled somehow, some time, in the very nature of things.

*c.* The Victims of Depression and Drought. As these words are written our land is in agony. All the resources of government have been marshaled against depression, but, so far as it is possible to judge, the battle goes against the radical plans for recovery which

have been so hopefully launched. More than half the country has felt the bitterness of drought and a long period of heat in which hundreds have perished. The watercourses are dried up. The heavens are as brass, and men are beginning to falter in despair. The outlook is black. But—the earth helped the woman. There are still vast resources of wealth which may be drawn upon for the benefit of the needy; the government stands pledged to do the utmost in its power; the courage and ingenuity of the people are not yet exhausted; and above all "the earth," Mother Nature, working always, in spite of seeming exceptions, toward balance—these will yet suffice to bring us out of our distresses.

2. If we look for something deeper than the testimony of history upon which to base our conviction that right will ultimately triumph, we can find help in verse eleven. "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." After all, the triumph of right in the world depends upon the triumph of right in our own hearts. This verse shows us what we need for that triumph. It was what Michael and his archangels needed for their triumph over the hosts of evil in heaven; it is what we need for victory in our lives on earth. On the basis of Christ's shed blood we can plead for and receive forgiveness. The word of testimony, that is, the revelation of God given to us in Christ, enables us to understand God and his great plan wrought out in our behalf. We know that he is love. We rejoice to serve him because he is love. And because of Christ's sacrifice and the revelation of God's love therein we can lead sacrificial lives—if need

be, unto death. "They loved not their lives unto the death." The words of the verse sum up for us the divine powers which are put at our disposal for the transformation of our inner selves into the likeness of Christ. So transformed, we can take our vital part in the long-drawn battle between the black battalions of the night and the golden legions of the dawn, which must end in the victory of Light.

The evil in the world can be defeated. The evil within our hearts can be defeated.

> "For right is right
> And God is God;
> And right the day must win.
> To doubt would be disloyalty,
> To falter would be sin."

There is nothing permanent in error. There is no stability in wrong. Give light its chance and it chases darkness away. The forces of goodness, working like growing roots in the chinks of the masonry of the foundations of all that is opposed to Christ, crack the false structures which rise upon those foundations, and in God's good time, in accordance with his invincible purpose, tumble them to ruin.

## Chapter XXI

# TWO LESSER BEASTS

### Revelation 13

STILL in the parenthesis between the Trumpet series of visions, and the Vial series, chapter thirteen describes the second and third great enemies of the church; the Roman Empire, and the priests of the cult of emperor-worship. The first enemy, Satan, the "dragon," was dealt with in chapter twelve.

Verse 1. "I." The Revised Version has "he" instead, that is, the "dragon." The passage (verses 1, 2) connects somewhat closely with Daniel 7. The beast here is the Roman Empire, the second of the three enemies. "Seven heads." The completeness of the Roman rule. "Ten horns," refers to a certain ten Roman emperors, just which ones it is difficult to say, depending upon what date is assigned to Revelation. "Name of blasphemy," that is, the name "Augustus" which carried an implication of the divine.

Verse 2. "Leopard, lion, bear." Taken from the vision of Daniel 7, representative there of various ancient kingdoms. The meaning here is that Rome has gathered to herself the powers and characteristics of older nations which had been opposed to the people of God in former times, as Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt. "And the dragon gave him his power," etc., that is, Satan gives power to the Roman Empire.

Verse 3. "One of the heads . . . wounded to death." Probably the reference is to Nero. He had died in the

year 68 A. D., but there was a widely held belief that he would one day return in the flesh and seek the complete extinction of the Christians. "Wondered." Rome was the wonder of the whole world.

Verse 4. The world worships the dragon, Satan, and the empire to which the dragon gives power.

Verse 10. "He that leadeth into captivity," etc. This is not analogous to the statement of Matthew 26. 52, that those who take the sword shall perish by the sword. It is to be understood thus: If the Christian must go into captivity, then he must go; if he must be killed, then he must die. Herein lies the opportunity for the Christian to exercise faith and patience, fortitude and endurance even unto death.

Verse 11. Here we have the second beast, the priestly caste of the emperor-worship. He does the will of the first beast, that is, the Roman Empire. He is lamblike in appearance but his speech is that of the "dragon." Wolves in sheep's clothing!

Verse 12. He is also a "dragon" in action, with the full authority of the dragon-inspired empire behind him. The reference at the end of the verse to the beast whose deadly wound is healed is not a direct reference to the restored and persecuting Nero as in verse 3, but is identified with the persecuting spirit of the empire as a whole.

Verse 13. Compare Jesus in Matthew 24. 24. Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2. 9.

Verse 14. The priests of the imperial cult were to make every effort to spread the false religion, even by the use of worship of images of the Cæsars. The end of the verse is in line with the end of verse 12.

Verse 15. Quasi-magic. Such is not infrequent in

the less enlightened Roman Catholic countries in our own day. "Should be killed." Death was the penalty for failing to do obeisance to the emperor.

Verses 16, 17. The exact meaning is open to difference of opinion, but the general tenor is clear. A citizen must be able to show himself a worshiper of the emperor or be debarred from the ordinary functions of civil life, such as buying and selling.

Verse 18. "Here is wisdom, that is, a challenge to mental skill. A challenge to read a riddle. How could a man be designated by a number? Because the letters of the Greek and Hebrew alphabets were also numbers. Our Arabic numerals came much later. So, if the letters of a man's name, each letter being a number, were taken and added together, a certain sum would result which might be considered the man's number. By a little manipulation almost any name-number might be arrived at. One name whose letter-numbers, in Hebrew, add up to 666 is Neron Cæsar. Nero stood to John as the incarnation and symbol of all persecuting emperors, so that it is quite possible that the reference is to him. This is the conclusion arrived at by R. H. Charles after reviewing the controversy which has gone on since the second century. Some commentators identify the number with Mohammed, Napoleon, or Luther. One of the most profound students of the book (Milligan) identifies it with the name of Christ.[1]

Query. Do verses 16, 17, refer back to the first "beast" of the chapter, that is, the Roman Empire, rather than to the priestly caste? Probably so, inasmuch

[1] For a highly interesting and important treatment of number in Apocalyptic compare A. H. Baldinger, *Sermons on Revelation,* Harper and Brothers. Also Wishart, *Book of Day,* p. 19, *et seq.*

as what is said refers to acts of civil rather than ecclesiastical authority.

### SERMON OUTLINE

"The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13. 8).

When Franz Liszt was feeling the hand of time upon him, he wrote his will. There was little to bequeath, of worldly goods. But there are sentences in the document which we may well treasure: "I am writing this on the date [September 4, 1860] when the church celebrates the elevation of the holy cross. The voice of this feast also expresses the ardent and mysterious emotion which like a sacred stigmata, has transpierced my entire life. Yes, Jesus Christ crucified, the madness and elevation of the cross, this was my true vocation."

The madness and elevation of the cross! What a strange sentence! What did Liszt mean by it? By "madness" he meant something so strange that it transcends all our usual way of looking at things. To the legal-minded Jew the cross was a stumbling-block; to the subtle philosophic Greek foolishness. Only to those who believe is it the power of God and the wisdom of God. By "elevation" he meant that it was a supreme event of history, "towering o'er the wrecks of time." In this he was echoing John, who gives us our text. What did John mean by it?

1. He meant that the crucifixion did not just happen. It was not simply that a young Jew emerged from obscurity, taught subversive doctrines, incurred the enmity of the scribes and Pharisees, who worked craftily through the ruling Romans to put him to death.

No, the cross was not an incident of history but a goal of history, an event predestined by the will of God from the beginning, a vital event of God's plan for the world before ever the world was created.

2. But it means more than that. It means that the principle of human progress is the principle of sacrifice. A great preacher once took the text "without shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin." But he stopped at the word "no." He then proceeded to show that without the principle of sacrifice there is nothing that makes for human betterment. It is a familiar thought, illustrated in every field. Those who have most enlarged the field of human knowledge have suffered most. The history of exploration gives abundant examples. Here is Peary striving to pierce the mystery of the north pole. For days he and his men have struggled on. They encounter one of the big leads in the ice. Half a mile of black water runs east and west as far as the eye can see. They were in a position which spelled certain death, if the opening did not freeze or close, for another great lead had opened behind. For days no wind arose to close it. The temperature was too high for freezing. Sledges were made into fuel. Dogs were killed for food. Finally thin, treacherous rubber ice stretched to the opposite shore. "No time was lost," says Peary in his diary, "hurrying to the place where it was evident to us all that now was our chance or never. We put on snowshoes, with which each man could be supported for a moment or two in the same spot. . . . There was a cry from someone in the line, the words sprang from me of themselves, 'God help him, which one is it?' But I dared not take my eyes from the steady, even gliding of my snowshoes. . . . During this day's march

and part of the next we stumbled desperately through this frozen Hades, constantly falling and being bruised. My uncushioned stumps (where the toes had been frozen off) seemed to catch it especially. . . . At our first camp my jaws were aching from the nervousness with which I had repeatedly ground my teeth together on the march." Explorers suffer. Those who have explored the perilous realms of biology to discover the origin and cure of disease, lay their lives upon altars of sacrifice. Upon the burdened minds, shattered bodies, and wounded hearts of courageous men and women has been laid the cross. They are broken lights, the reflection of the perfection which was in Christ, the Light which lighteth every man, and from their sufferings as from his, the world is educated and shamed and stimulated to do his will. Teachers and missionaries bring their broken health, fathers and mothers their privation and self-denial, children their sacrifice, statesmen their minds, soldiers their wounds, each a part of the price which must be paid for the emancipation of the world.

John had laid hold of this truth in its widest possible implications. He saw that the Lamb had been slain not only *from* the foundation of the world but *for* the foundation of the world. The plan was ancient as time itself; but it was also essential as God himself—to the working out of his purpose for mankind.

The world to John is a development, and an upward development. It is a development by self-sacrifice. The progress of the ages, as far as there is any progress, is by self-surrender. Take intellect. Is mind force greater in the modern American than in the ancient Greek? Are Plato and Aristotle inferior to the best intellects

among us? Take imagination. Have we equaled the architectural conception which planned the pyramids? Surpassed the poetry of Homer? Matched the medieval painters? Plainly, not. John says that creation is moving toward a type—a Lamb slain—and that it is moving toward that type in a straight line, the line of sacrifice. To him the world was interpenetrated by the principle of selflessness. He saw the waves of the sea of Patmos passing into waves of light; he beheld the waves of light passing into the bosom of the sea. It seemed to him that even in the place of his lonely exile God had inscribed upon nature the image of a cross. He then passed from the picture of sacrifice in nature to its actual representation in animal life. "Lamb" brings to mind the whole system of Old-Testament sacrifice. He said it was a type of higher sacrifice. A type of Christ. What was the difference, then, between the sacrifice of the animal, and the sacrifices offered by men, and Christ? It is an inward difference. The forced has become the voluntary. What has made it voluntary? It is love, a force to which nothing in the animal world exactly corresponds, a force which adds to the sacrifice and at the same time helps to bear it. And yet merely natural love is far from having reached the goal. It is noble. It is beautiful. But it is not the topmost triumph. The love of mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, daughters, are each and all a search for the source of all. John's "love" looks out for a vaster type—a love that can function where there is no tie of kindred. He seeks a love that strives for the survival of even the unfit; the blood of a spotless One that can wash away the sins of the absolutely unworthy. This is to John the perfect type of selflessness—the Lamb that was slain. It is prog-

ress toward this type which constitutes for John the real philosophy of history.

3. But the text still means something more. Not something greater, but something different and important. It shows the essential dignity and worth of a human being.

There are many modern minds—a whole trend of present-day thinking—which has no belief in the superlative worth of a human being. This is because there is little belief in a God to whom the individual is related, and little belief in a future life. The attitude is reflected in much of our contemporary verse. Here, for example, is a little poetry magazine. One of its principal aims is to give young poets a chance to get their work into print. What is the attitude of these young poets toward life? Their lines are sad and languid. The magazine is a little journal of the lugubrious. These writers either have no philosophy of life at all, or else a philosophy of complete pessimism. Life is a trap. We are caught in it when we are born. There is little of happiness or hope to be expected. Death waits for all, and the end of life is extinction in the cold blackness of the tomb. Man, in view of the vastness which science now assigns to the universe, is no more than a mote, insignificant in the vast scheme of things, and the infinitesimal thing which we call a human life has no destiny beyond the cemetery. So the poetry magazines become feeble booklets. One wonders why they write, these poets. If life is so blank and meaningless, it would seem scarcely worth while to record any phase of it. And the quality of the verse is on a level with what these authors believe to be the quality of human life, bearing out an implication of

Walter Lippmann's in his *A Preface to Morals,* that it is impossible to have a great art without a great theology.

But John has a great theology. It is a theology which makes a human life a thing of infinite worth. A human soul is so great a thing, he says, that God planned for its redemption and its perfecting from the eternities. For each of us is so significant that the Son of God, the Lamb of God, was slain for us, each of us, from the foundation of the world.

To-day we consider our gospel in one of its profoundest aspects. Yet even this aspect has a practical relation to our daily living. For what is the text, and what our consideration of it save a driving home to heart and conscience, of our Lord's own words: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life . . . shall find it." So we link the homely principle of unselfishness to a philosophy of history. So, by simple sacrificial kindness, put our little stone in the mighty temple of God's vast purpose for the race.

"The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." "The madness and elevation of the cross!"

## Chapter XXII

# JOY AND VICTORY FOR THE FAITHFUL

### Revelation 14

THIS chapter is in striking contrast with the two preceding it. There the three enemies of the Church, Satan, the Roman Empire, and the priestly cult of emperor-worship, were exerting such power against the people of God that the effect is thoroughly depressing. Chapter fourteen sounds the note of re-assurance. "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." The portrayal of the Lamb and his attendant host forms a message of joy and victory for them that endure.

Verse 1. Not "a" but *the* Lamb. The one hundred and forty-four thousand represent the whole company of the redeemed. They are the faithful, who like the seven thousand in 1 Kings 19 had not bowed the knee to Baal. They are in all probability identical with those "sealed" in 7. 4, the entire body of Christians living in the last days. "Having his name and the name of his Father," so the Revised Version renders it. The Father and the Son are on an equality. The "mark" is in contrast to the "mark of the beast," set upon the foreheads of those who had yielded to his power in 13. 17.

Verse 4. "Virgins." It would seem that a high value is put upon asceticism here, but this does not accord with the marriage symbolism so often used in other places in the book. It is better to regard the words as

descriptive of the purity of sex life among the redeemed, both of the married and the unmarried. If the full literal significance of "virgins" is to be retained, and if we are to understand that there are no women or children in the company of the redeemed, then we must believe that an editor who failed to comprehend the mind of John inserted the statement in its present form. "First fruits." Always in the Old Testament the choicest of the flock and the field were used for sacrifice and offering.

Verse 6. "The everlasting gospel." This phrase has given rise to much discussion. In the original there is no article before the noun, so that the natural reading is *"an* everlasting gospel," referring seemingly to the judgment which follows. But how could "an eternal good news" consist of a drastic judgment? Perhaps it would be good news from the point of view of the suffering saints. But on the whole the rendering of the Authorized Version seems most satisfactory. "The" everlasting gospel.

Verse 7. Compare Mark 1. 15. There is a striking parallel also in the words of Paul to the men of Lystra, Acts 14. 15.

Verse 8. "Babylon" is Rome. The reference anticipates the full description of the judgment upon Rome found in chapter 18. "Drink of the wine," etc. Here two ideas are joined. Rome has given the wine of corruption to the nations; both Rome and the nations drink of the cup of God's wrath.

Verses 9, 10, 11. The final judgment upon the unrepentant wicked set forth in four particulars. The words are not to be understood literally. It is highly imaginative language to express the fact that the doom

of the unrepentant is a fearsome thing. (Boussuet: "The Apocalypse is a declaration of war against the worshipers of the Cæsars.")

Verse 12. "Here is the patience of the saints." The saints know that endurance is expected of them. In this particular field, the struggle with the "beast," it is to be exercised.

Verse 13. "Voice." Like that of 10. 4. The character and life of the faithful go with them into eternity. Perhaps the best commentary on "their works follow with them" is found in Matthew 25. 34-40, and the last part of verse 46.

Verse 14. "A white cloud." The imagery derives from Daniel 7. 13. Compare also Mark 14. 62; Matthew 24. 30; Revelation 1. 7. "Son of man." The title has a long history, from Daniel down. As Christ applied it to himself it carried a strong supernatural implication. The verse is an anticipatory announcement of that which will later be described and developed in detail.

Verse 15. An angel carries a message of command from the Father to the Son. From this point to the end of the chapter we find a description of the assembling of both the righteous and the unrighteous for judgment. Verse 20 describes a visitation of wrath upon the wicked alone. The meaning of the symbolic "thousand and six hundred furlongs" is impossible to conjecture.

### SERMON OUTLINE

"And they sung . . . a new song . . . ; and no man could learn that song but the . . . redeemed" (Revelation 14. 3).

"A new song." That is, a song different from any song of earth, having in it nothing sensual, nothing common, nothing imperfect, nothing of human limitation. "And no man could learn that song but the . . . redeemed." Only those who had had a certain experience could master those divine tones and heavenly harmonies. It suggests to us the familiar truth, Experience must precede Expression.

1. A man's most perfect expression of truth, of beauty, of anything whatsoever, is always the result of his own personal experience. Yet, at first sight, it would seem that an exception must be made in the case of the genius. Follow the myriad-minded Shakespeare through his plays. Observe his development of his characters. Here are scores of men and women who live and move and speak, whose inmost thoughts and emotions are set down with skillful fidelity. Shall we say that Shakespeare has experienced all that his characters express? Had he known indecision with Hamlet? Did he know the impulse of murder with Macbeth? Possibly yes, in the innermost depths of consciousness, but that he could have actually experienced that which he puts into the mouths of Rosalind and Wolsey and Henry the Eighth and the Merry Wives of Windsor is unthinkable. No, it is the very hallmark of authentic literary genius that it can discover in others, and set down, experiences which it has never actually felt. Yet even in the case of Shakespeare the statement above, that a man's finest expression is a result of his personal experience, can be defended. Critics agree that Shakespeare's consummate literary achievement is his sonnets. They also agree that the sonnets record a personal experience. . . . For those who are

less than geniuses the statement is certainly true. Experience must precede excellence of expression.

2. Go a step farther. Our finest expression is the result of our hardest experiences. It was after pain, humiliation, and remorse that Peter could preach his Pentecostal sermon and write his letters to the infant church. His morning song came after his night of sorrow. . . . As a young man Franklin D. Roosevelt was like most young men, loving play much better than work. Social gayety, without too much sound thinking, filled his days. To be hail-fellow-well-met and to do decently some interesting job seemed the full measure of his ambition. Then came his long, shattering illness, the endless weeks in bed, the strong probability that his career was at an end. It was then that the real Roosevelt began to emerge. He would get well at whatever cost of iron discipline and painful effort. And as the long battle began to be won, as the blood carried the crimson tide of life to the nerves, and the nerves carried the mandate of brain and will to the muscles, a new and different man appeared. There was a totally different character. There was a new birth. As in the case of Peter a man unstable in many ways had become a man of rock. He sang a new song. A song no man could learn save in hard experience. No rollicking stein song now, but a stanza which carried the clang of bugles and the clash of swords.

It is the law of life. Whether the expression be in achievement or in character, hard experience precedes worthy expression. It is a law which no man, not even a genius, can escape. As a youth Lincoln expressed himself in "besting" the Clary Grove boys at wrestling. Then life reached out and took him. It bowed him

with defeat, it broke him with love for a girl who died, it pierced him with the many sorrows of civil war. After that he could express himself in the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural, and in a character which grows in stature with the passing of the years.

3. If we could really grasp the significance of the text, it would help us over many a hard place in the road. It would help us to make disaster an educative process. Grief and pain and frustration come flooding down upon us all at one time or another. As they come, it seems to be about all we can do to keep our heads above water. We have neither the time nor the inclination to ask what they may mean for future years. But if we are wise, we shall cast a look along the road ahead. A broken home means something more than a broken home. A major operation has some significance beyond apprehension and weakness and pain and a big hospital bill and a long absence from business. Bankruptcy is more than a legal term, more than being stripped of material possessions. These are the staves upon which notes of new music ought to be written. They are intimations of a possible future harmony beyond anything we have heretofore been able to express. We should not be content with saying merely "how desperately hard this is," but go on to ask, "What does it mean? How can I use it to fertilize life, to fructify effort, to produce a nobler psalm which will sing within the heart?" We should say: "All this has a purpose. It is not loss but gain if I can peer down the future, reaching a hand through time to catch the far off interest of tears."

Few things are more maddening than the mechanical monotony of piano tuning; the harsh hammering, the

slow stretching of groaning strings upon their rack of torture. It is not so maddening when we remember that the purpose of it is a purpose of beauty. The hammering and the twisting of the wrench are the hard experiences of life, but they are a preparation for life's sublimest music.

4. Of those who have learned to sing the new song three things are told us.

*a*. They were not defiled. That is, they had kept themselves from evil. That was their negative virtue, by no means unimportant, but there is something positive also—

*b*. They followed the Lamb whithersoever he went. They had achieved the active sacrificial spirit. They not only kept themselves from evil. They campaigned for the good.

*c*. They were redeemed. They had the supreme experience which comes to every human soul when it knows its sins forgiven, and finds itself in harmony with the will of God. It is this above all which puts a new music into the heart, a music which wells to the lips in praise for a new understanding of the fundamental meanings of life. A new song. Forever new. For earth and time. For heaven and eternity. An expression of the soul based upon the profoundest experience any soul may know.

## Chapter XXIII

## SEVEN GOLDEN BOWLS OF WOE

### Revelation 15–16

THE parenthesis chapters, twelve to fourteen, between the Trumpet and the Vial series of visions, are ended. We now approach the Vial series. Chapter fifteen is introductory, the series proper being contained in chapter sixteen.

Verse 2. "Sea of glass." Compare 4. 6. The picture is of something that looked like a sea of glass because of its smooth calmness. Yet it is instinct with life, not dull, opaque; for its calmness is "mingled with fire." The imagery is frequent in both the Old Testament and later Jewish apocalyptic writings.

Verse 3. "Song of Moses and the Lamb." A music which comprehends both Dispensations. "Thou King of saints." The best manuscripts read "king of ages" or "king of nations."

Verse 5. Compare 11. 19. Here the emphasis is on "testimony," that is, the tablets of the Law which bore witness to the holiness and justice of God. In 11. 19 it is the ark to which attention is drawn, the symbol of the covenant of divine grace.

Verse 7. "Beasts." Living Ones, as in 4. 6. "Vials." Broad, shallow vessels like large saucers, so that their contents could be poured out all at once and suddenly. They might more properly be called bowls, being like the basins of the Temple furniture used for presenting incense, drink-offerings or libations, but here filled with the wine of the wrath of God.

Verse 8. The Temple is conceived as closed for regular purposes of worship until the Judgment scene is completed. God is not to be approached when he is manifesting himself in all the terrors of his anger, Compare Exodus 19. 21.

In Chapter Sixteen we have the pouring out of the Vials. It is the revelation of the "third woe" of 11. 14. The plagues which follow on the pouring are not a repetition of those of the Trumpet series, nor a series wholly unrelated to that of the Trumpets. They represent that which must occur immediately before the coming of Christ. They have a special application to the forms of iniquity which chapters twelve to fourteen have revealed.

Verse 2. The first Vial. Suggestive of the sixth Egyptian plague.

Verse 3. Suggests the first plague.

Verses 5, 6, 7. A just judgment. "They are worthy," that is, worthy of this judgment.

Verse 8. There are many resemblances between the Trumpet and the Vial series. Compare 8. 12. The first four Vials form a group as do the first four Seals and the first four Trumpets. In each case the first four are specific, the last three general. The remaining three of the Vial series, in this chapter, have direct reference to definite enemies of the Church of God.

Verses 10, 11. The fifth Vial. "Seat," that is, Rome. "Full of darkness," that is, overwhelmed with darkness. Compare 9. 1, 2. Also Exodus 10. 21, 23. "Pains and sores." Due, not to darkness, but to the first and subsequent Vials. These judgments are not merely successive but cumulative, in accordance with John's well-developed dramatic instinct.

Verse 12. Compare 9. 13ff. "Kings of the east." The reference is probably to the Parthians. The tradition was that these would come with the returning Nero to possess Rome and annihilate the Christians.

Verse 13. "Dragon," that is, Satan. Compare chapter 12. "Beast," that is, the Roman Empire. Compare chapter 13. "False prophet," that is, the second beast of chapter 13, the priesthood of the emperor-worship. "Unclean spirits," that is, seducing spirits. Compare 1 Timothy 4. 1. Frogs are suggestive of uncleanness and endless noise.

Verse 14. The verse is parenthetical.

Verse 15. The speaker is the same as in 1. 17, that is, Christ. Similar to 3. 3. Compare Matthew 24. 38-44. "Keepeth garments." The watcher is ready for the most sudden summons.

Verse 16. There has been a long-drawn-out discussion over the meaning of the word "Armageddon," and the site of the battle. In John's conception it is the place where the final battle between the hosts of good and evil will be fought out. It has been generally understood that he has in mind the Plain of Esdrælon, at one end of which stood the town of Megiddo. (Hence, Armageddon.) This plain was a frequent battleground of Scripture, one of these conflicts ending in the great victory over Sisera, celebrated in the song of Deborah. Judges 5.

Verse 17. "It is done." This is, the close of the cycle of Vials; the completion of the preparation for judgment.

Verse 19. Rome is divided and destroyed.

Verse 20. Compare 6. 14; 20. 11.

Verse 21. Here the seventh Vial comes into paral-

lelism with the seventh Trumpet, 11. 19, and the seventh plague, Exodus 9. 18–26. "Hail." The stones of fifty or sixty pounds weight. "And men blasphemed." The only effect of all these judgments is to harden the hearts of the worshipers of the beast.

### SERMON OUTLINE

"And they sing the song of Moses . . . and . . . of the Lamb" (Revelation 15. 3).

In the book of Exodus we read how the Israelites, pursued by the hosts of Pharaoh, reach the shore of the Red Sea. The pitiless water stretches in front; close behind are their exultant enemies. Moses lifts his hand toward the waters, and Jehovah causes the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, making the sea dry land. The Israelites escape. The Egyptians essaying to follow are drowned. Then came the great anthem of triumph and deliverance, led by Miriam the prophetess, with a timbrel in her hand, all her women following with timbrels and with dances. "Sing ye to the Lord," she said, "for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

John may have had this scene in mind when he wrote of "The song of Moses," for his thought is molded by Old-Testament forms. But the meaning of the phrase goes deeper. Moses was the Lawgiver. The Old Testament Dispensation was a Dispensation of Law. The song of Moses would celebrate, for John, the great contribution which God's Law, given to Moses, and proclaimed by him in the Ten Commandments, had made toward the redemption of the world.

The Song of the Lamb. Throughout Revelation we find mighty outpourings of praise to Christ. But here the Song of the Lamb, joined as it is with the Song of Moses, yields a meaning beyond mere praise. It is the song of a new Dispensation. It is a song of sacrificial love, and what that love means in the redemption of mankind. . . . The Song of Moses, and of the Lamb, then, is at once a song of majestic law and sacrificial love. It is the double keynote of two Dispensations. And while we separate the two ideas in our thought, we must never forget the essential unity, in spite of all diversities, of the revelation of God in the Old Covenant by law and punishment; and the revelation of God in the New Covenant by the cross and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We of this generation will be slow to minimize the importance of law. We have sought out laws of mathematics, physics, laws of heat and light, laws of the air, and laws of radio-active energy all unknown to our fathers. We magnify these. Sometimes, to our undoing, we all but worship them. Yet we know well enough, when we stop to think of it, that the moral laws set down in the Commandments, which run automatically against every violator, are of far more importance than any law of the material world. Who are we, in this age of emphasized physical law, to forget or deny the validity of moral law? The validity of the one is as perfect as that of the other. If we attempt to evaluate the contribution which the Decalogue has made to human progress, we shall find it immense beyond our computation. We can sing, full-throated, the song of Moses, the servant of God, the giver of the law.

But like the triumphant saints in the text we can also sing another song, the Song of the Lamb. "The law," says Paul in a pregnant sentence, "was our pedagogue to bring us to Christ." The pedagogue was a slave who had charge of his master's children, who taught them rudimentary lessons, then led them to the porch of one who could impart a higher education. The higher lessons were quite beyond the power of the pedagogue, but he could teach a little, and could make sure that the children were in the proper place when the professor or philosopher should begin his work. The law, say Paul, taught us something, but of this the most important was that it, in itself, was clearly inadequate; that for full knowledge we must sit in the school of Christ, at the feet of the Great Teacher.

Wherein lies the superiority of the gospel over the Law? In one aspect, at least, it lies in the strong emphasis which the gospel puts upon *restoration.* The Law was not wholly without this element. Men watched the working of divine principles, and were led into ways of righteousness. They heard the voices of the prophets crying in compassion over their waywardness and came back to the Father's house. But always the essential affinity of the Old Covenant was between Law and Punishment. That is the motif of the Song of Moses. In the Song of the Lamb, Love and Restoration are the two affinities and give the central theme. The Law says: "I will punish you for what you did." The gospel says: "I will restore you to what you were before you did it. I will restore you to that ideal which lies buried somewhere in your heart, but which, for the moment, you forget." Before the Law we stand in fear. Before the gospel we feel something which is

like rain after drought, which restores life's desert to what it was meant to be—a garden that rejoices and blossoms as the rose.

Repeatedly we fall away from that which we know to be the best and the highest. The Law says: "I will punish you for that." The gospel says: "Christ was punished in your stead. Will you not, in gratitude for his sacrifice, strive to come up again to the level on which you ought to live?" Yes, we fall away. Call it the weakness of human nature; say it is due to the company we choose, or are forced, to keep; call it the result of heredity or environment, or what we will, the fact remains. And over against this deep tendency of human nature the gospel sets itself. It shows a life which never once fell below a divine standard. From the lips of Him who lived that life there come those portrayals which melt our hearts and shame us into nobility. The picture of a boy who left a father's love behind and wandered, finding at length, when he had come to himself, that his father had been waiting to welcome him back ever since he went away. The picture of a woman sinning much, forgiven much because she loved much. And we behold in Christ himself one who having loved his own, loved them unto the end, his voice now breaking in compassion over a city which had forsworn her highest destiny; and now proclaiming to every sinner under heaven: "He that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Out of the gospel has grown a church where the highest in us is appealed to and nurtured. Here, in song and sermon and sacred story and in the sacrament, we are persuaded to our best. And then, because the gospel has a profound respect for personality, and because God has no desire

for a compulsory service, we are left to make our own choice.

"To every man there openeth a high way and a low;
And every man decideth the way his soul shall go."

"They sang the song of Moses and of the Lamb." If we will not sing the song of the Lamb, we must, perforce, sing the song of Moses. If we will not yield to the persuasions of Grace, we remain under the dominion of Law. Who of us can satisfy the Law? None. Only the Lamb, the sacrificial Lamb, can satisfy the Law, on our behalf. The song of Moses is a great song. But its superlative greatness is this: It is a prelude to something greater than itself—the song of the Lamb.

Are you conscious of having lost something? Something which at times you have a longing to find? Is goodness lost? Is innocence lost? Is your relation to God lost? Is your sensitiveness of conscience lost? Is your peace of heart lost? Is your love of the best lost? And the day when you could pray to God as naturally as you talk to your own mother—is that day lost? Aye, the years take such bitter toll of the precious things of the spirit! Have you lost something? Ask God to give it back. Put your head down upon the pew in front of you and pray, in the spirit of humility and faith: "O God, make me what I was. O Christ, make me more than ever I was, or ever can be, in my own strength. Help me to lose the discords of my life, not in the song of Moses alone, for that no man can do, but in the song of Moses and of the Lamb!"

## Chapter XXIV

## BABYLON: MOTHER OF HARLOTS

### Revelation 17

IN THIS chapter Rome is described under the figure of a harlot, and judgment is pronounced upon her.

Throughout the writer draws freely upon the imagery of the Old Testament prophets, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Verse 1. "The great whore." Rome. "Sitteth upon many waters." The only water close to Rome was the little Tiber, although her cosmopolitan harbor at Ostia was not far away. The language draws from Jeremiah 51. 13, and its exact meaning is explained in verse 15.

Verse 2. Compare Isaish 23. 17. Nahum 3. 4. Rome had corrupted all nations by the influence of her example.

Verse 3. "In the spirit." In the state of prophetic ecstasy. "Beast." The political power of Rome. The purple and scarlet of this verse and the next imply the pomp and luxury of the empire.

Verse 5. "Babylon," is used to designate Rome because, in preceding centuries, Babylon had been a center of activity against the Jewish Church, as Rome now is against the Christian Church. "Abominations." According to her own historians Rome was a seat of degeneracy, not hidden, but practiced openly. Vice at its ugliest was fashionable. Compare Romans 1. 24-32.

Verse 6. "Drunken." The word carries the implication of orgies of persecution. Martyrs were not merely put to death, but put to death by cruel and unusual methods and with every ingenious insult. Wrapped in the fresh skins of wild beasts they were worried to death by dogs. Smeared with pitch they were used as torches to light the imperial gardens. "Wondered with great admiration" should read "wondered with great wonder." John is astonished at the iniquity of Rome as Jeremiah was at the fall of Babylon. Compare Jeremiah 51. 13; 51. 37, 41.

Verse 8. "Beast." Here the word, which is used frequently as a general figure for the imperial power, is interpreted as a single personality in whom that power was once lodged and will be again. The reference is to the popular expectation of the return of Nero.

Verse 9. "Here . . . is wisdom." That is, the meaning of these things is apparent only to the truly wise. "Seven mountains." The seven hills of Rome.

Verse 10. "Seven kings," etc. It is impossible to say with certainty who these seven emperors may be.

Verse 11. This appears to be another allusion to the Nero tradition. "Observe, as characteristic of the way in which apocalyptic figures dissolve into one another, that the 'beast' and 'the eighth' of his own heads are plainly identified together. If the seventh is Titus, it is after the close of his reign that the return of Nero, who had been one of the 'seven' is looked for; or, if the book, including this passage, were of later date, then the apostle recognizes in Domitian a replica of Nero" (C. A. Scott). Under this interpretation John makes clear his own disbelief in a literal Nero-return,

finding in Domitian, who was a bloody, persecuting emperor, a Nero.

Verse 12. The "seven heads" of verse 3 is explained in verse 9. The "ten horns" are explained here. The probable reference is to certain Parthian rulers, satraps, as whose leader Nero was supposed to return—the "kings from the east" of 16. 12. Their power is to be for "one hour," that is, of the briefest duration.

Verse 13. The ten will, in a sense, ally themselves with the beast, that is, Rome.

Verse 14. They will make war upon the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer.

Verse 16. The harlot-city will be destroyed by the very forces which she has fostered and developed. This is of course true in one sense. Rome was overthrown by her own sins. But it is impossible to find historical events which accord closely with a literal interpretation of the verse.

Verse 17. "For God," etc. Nowhere in Revelation is there any trace of dualism. God is all in all and marshals all things, even the schemes of evil men, according to the purpose of his omnipotent will. "Words," that is, those referring to the destruction of the city.

### SERMON OUTLINE

"The Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of Lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful. . . . And the ten horns . . . shall . . . make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire" (Revelation 17. 14, 16).

Again in chapter seventeen, as so often throughout

the book, along with something of the unpleasant, and the unintelligible, the author of Revelation declares his faith in the final victory of righteousness. The good will triumph. The evil will be defeated—in God's good time. This is his sure conviction.

This conviction is based upon three factors:

1 (verse 14). The Lamb. The power of sacrificial love has been let loose in the world. The hosts of evil are mighty. As John writes they are in the ascendent. But this will not last. The love of the Lamb is omnipotent. Lords and kings of unrighteousness may prevail for a day, but the eternities belong to the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He is Lord of lords and King of kings. In the end the government shall be upon his shoulder.

2 (verse 14). The Lamb's Followers. "They that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." In any military campaign there are the leaders and the led. There is the general and there is the army. The best army will fail if it is not well led. The finest leadership will fail if the army is cowardly, discontented, or undisciplined. But in the campaign which John has in mind, the campaign of the good against the evil, there is an ideal, invincible combination. The leader is Christ, the Lamb, Lord of lords and King of kings; and the army is of picked men—*called, chosen,* and *faithful.*

*a.* We like to think of the church, the army of Christ, under this description. We see Jesus in the early days of his ministry calling men. He walked, now beside the sea, now in the countryside, now in the towns and cities, and he called men. Now from their fishing-boats, now from the plow, now from the shop or the

tax-booth. They were "men of the world" when he found them, each busy at his own occupation, each cherishing his own particular faults and sins. Then —they were "called." They heard a voice—new, strange, compelling. That voice spoke two words: "Follow me." And the fishers became fishers of men, the plowmen plowed the fields of God, the merchants traded in souls, the taxgatherers levied upon spiritual values and brought their returns into a treasury where moth and rust could not corrupt nor thieves break through and steal. Those who heard the call to "follow" were renewed in their inner life by their contact with the Master and gave themselves to new functions in a new world. . . . So it has been ever since. Hearing that summons, men have made his service the matter of prime importance. Called to his colors they have refused to shackle themselves with the things of this world. They have dedicated themselves to fight the beast for the duration of the war.

*b*. "Chosen." It was the "chosen" who dedicated themselves for the duration of the war, not necessarily all the "called." There is a difference in any army between being called and chosen. In the late war a hundred were called for every one who was found fit, and chosen. There is a difference between merely "enlisted men" and "picked men."

In the book of Judges we have the story of Gideon's army. It mustered thirty-two thousand men. And Gideon said: "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return,"—and twenty-two thousand run away. The ten thousand remaining take up the march. Wearied and thirsty they reach a brook in the way. Gideon watches as they drink. Some there are who scoop up a

little water with the hand, put it to the lips and plunge across. The others stop still, and kneel down to drink their fill. All but three hundred do this. And Gideon leaves the nine thousand seven hundred behind and with his three hundred chosen goes on to gain a mighty victory that day. Many are called, few are chosen. Of those who flock to the church how few can be counted on for the supreme courage in the crisis, the supreme sacrifice and service in the war in which there is no discharge! But the chosen are the choice. It is they who make the army of the cross invincible.

*c.* "Faithful." They are faithful in the sense that they have confidence in their Commander. They are faithful also in the sense that their fidelity to duty is continuous, complete, habitual, instinctive. How noble is the quality of faithfulness in an army or a church! There are some who join a church and disappear before the ink which writes their names on the church register is dry. There are some who are semifaithful, and some—hardy perennials—who seem to think that all their obligations as church members are discharged if they appear on Easter Sunday. And there are some who can always be counted on. It is these who give the church whatever power it may have. And how highly the Master praises the quality of faithfulness! "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." Over and over again we find it in Revelation: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

These are two of the factors, then, upon which John bases his conviction of the final triumph of righteousness. First, a Captain who offers himself in sacrificial love, a very Lord of lords and a King of kings.

Second, a band of followers who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, called, and chosen, and faithful. But there is yet another basis for John's conviction.

3 (verse 16). The Self-Destructiveness of Evil. Here we are told that ten nations, allied for a brief time with the harlot-city, will turn against her, will make her desolate and naked, and burn her with fire. The verse says to us that evil always carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. It is this fact which is the third foundation stone for John's conviction of the final triumph of righteousness.

Mary Webb was born in England in 1881 and died there in 1927. She was a confirmed invalid at twenty, married at thirty, died at forty-six. Her life story is one of poverty and struggle. Her husband was a tutor in a remote hamlet. When he fell ill, in order to eke out the family income, Mary Webb would rise at three in the morning, pick her flowers and carry them nine miles to a market town. Her stock disposed of she would walk the nine miles back. All the time she was trying to write, and though she had recognition by only a few in her lifetime, she is now by way of becoming a classic. In her finest novel, *Precious Bane,* she tells the story of Gideon Sarn. He has two consuming vices, greed and ambition. To these he sacrifices all else. He toils like a Titan. He scrimps like a miser. He refuses to marry the woman to whom he is betrothed, because it will interfere with his plans. When his mother, old and sick of a lingering illness, becomes a burden, he puts poison in her tea. . . . The wealth he accumulates is all lost; he becomes a haunted man, and finally ends his life in the mist-covered Lake of Sarn.

Evil carries in it the seeds of its own undoing. "Fret

not thyself because of evildoers," says the psalmist, ". . . for they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb." Even the old pagan Ovid, writing before the Christian era, declared, "An evil life is a kind of death." Perhaps that was one reason why Jesus was so patient with the tares in the parable. Let both wheat and tares grow together until the harvest, he said to those who would root out the tares. He knew that, given time, the tares would uproot themselves.

This was one reason why John, who saw in Rome the very incarnation of the powers of evil, was certain that she would work her own destruction. The empire had established a great system of law and police, almost coterminous with the civilized world. So strong was she that men believed she would stand forever. But the centuries passed and the invasions of the barbarians began. On they came, Goths and Huns and Vandals; on they came, wrecking cities, devastating provinces, breaking up the old fabric of society, and establishing in its place a state of things from which Rome had once delivered the world—a number of petty states, constantly at war with each other, and lacking the primary essentials of social order. But was it the Goths and Huns and Vandals who really destroyed Rome? No, Rome overthrew herself. She had imported the moral corruptions of the Orient. She had taken them to her bosom until they ate out the heart and fiber of the Roman strength, and Rome came crashing to her fall as a tree before a tempest when all the inside is rotted away, and only a shell remains.

Upon a great Commander; upon a loyal army; upon the self-destructiveness of evil John bases his conviction of the final triumph of the good.

"Yet saints their watch are keeping,
Their cry goes up, 'How long?'
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song."

Soon? Not, perhaps, as we count time. But soon, as God reckons with the hourglass of the ages, the Lamb shall prevail against the Beast.

## Chapter XXV

# THE GRANDEUR THAT WAS ROME

### Revelation 18

FROM the literary point of view this is one of the great chapters of Revelation. The language is a mosaic made up largely from the writings of the Old Testament prophets, yet it contains few solecisms and is couched in good Greek. How completely drenched was John's mind in the thought and speech of the older Scriptures! Passages in the book quoted from or based upon the Old Testament number two hundred and twenty-nine.[1] Read aloud, this chapter is a noble, beautiful, terrible, impressive poem.

Having predicted the fall of Rome in chapters fourteen, verse eight, and in chapter seventeen, the author now describes that fall as accomplished and notes the issues thereof. The passage involves few difficulties and is one of the easiest of the chapters to understand.

Verse 2. "Habitation of devils." Similar is the prediction concerning Babylon in Isaiah 13. 21, and of Edom in Isaiah 34. 13-15. Compare Articles "Demon" and "Lilith" in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible.*

Verse 3. Compare Ezekiel's description of the pomp of Tyre (27. 9-27).

Verse 7. A transition from the height of influence to the utmost degradation. Compare Isaiah 3. 16-26.

[1] Nor was John unfamiliar with other parts of the New Testament. He drew from Matthew, Luke, First Thessalonians, First and Second Corinthians, Ephesians and probably Galatians, First Peter, James, and possibly one or more others, in over fifty instances.

Verse 8. Isaiah's prophecy concerning Babylon is still in the mind of John (47. 9).

Verse 12. "Thyine wood," that is, all kinds of scented wood, whether for burning or interior furnishing or finishing—citron, cedar, sandal-wood, and the like.

Verse 13. "Spice." Better, unguent. "Slaves, and souls of men." The phrase has given rise to wide discussion. Is it a repetition, or do "slaves" and "souls of men" connote two different entities? It is more probable that the two expressions are synonyms. If not, "souls of men" might refer to gladiators bought and sold for the death struggles of the arena.

Verse 14. The description now takes the form of direct address, probably by the writer himself. Like Ezekiel he "takes up a lamentation" over the doomed city.

Verse 18. "What city is like unto this great city!" So Ezekiel in 27. 32. "What city is like Tyrus?"

Verse 19. The description still draws from Ezekiel (27. 30).

Verse 20. "God hath avenged you on her." Literally, God hath judged your judgment. It was a judgment in favor of the saints, in answer to the prayers of the martyrs (6. 9).

Verse 22. Compare Ezekiel 26. 13. Isaiah 14. 11. Jeremiah 25. 10.

Verse 23. "Princes." Compare 6. 5. "Sorcery." Compare Isaiah 47. 12; Nahum 3. 4.

Verse 24. Compare Ezekiel 24. 6. But the sin of this Babylon—Rome—is deeper; she is "drunken" with the blood of believers. "All that were slain upon the earth." Rome, in one vivid flight of the seer's prophetic imagination, becomes a figure for all the cruelty

of the world, and is made responsible for all blood unjustly spilled.

### SERMON OUTLINE

Revelation 18.

John beheld his visions and probably wrote his book on the island of Patmos in the Ægean Sea. It was a scene of beauty, far from the madding crowd. Sunrise and sunset, and a sea that now murmured, now thundered, on the beach. . . . But his mind was not confined to Patmos. His thought knew no limitations. It dwelt often upon the mighty Roman Empire, and upon the capital, the city of Rome, potent and arrogant upon her seven hills.

We know what a powerful spell Rome has cast upon the imaginations of men. Byron cried: "O Rome! My country! City of the soul! When falls the Coliseum, Rome shall fall; and when Rome falls—the world." The Emperor Augustus said: "You cheer my heart who build as if Rome would be eternal." "All roads lead to Rome," is an ancient proverb. Samuel Rogers wrote:

> "I am in Rome! Oft as the morning ray
> Visits these eyes, waking at once I cry,
> Whence this excess of joy? What has befallen me?
> And from within a thrilling voice replies,
> 'Thou art in Rome.' "

Poe sings of

> ". . . the glory that was Greece,
> And the grandeur that was Rome."

But what we are interested to know is how Rome appeared in the eyes of a Christian prophet. How did John see Rome?

1. John was impressed by the Power of Rome. The empire had made herself dominant over the greater part of the known world. Her armies conquered everywhere, and what her armies conquered her laws and roads and bridges and her administrators held. Such might, men thought, could not be overthrown by gods or men. All her greatness centered in the city of Rome, which was a very wonder of the world. John did not underestimate her importance. He marveled at it. Throughout the chapter, in a refrain of wonder and amazement, runs the phrase, "That *great* city!"

2. John was impressed by the Wickedness of Rome. He saw within her the depraved, degenerate, disgusting vices which her own historians chronicled without shame; vices that were not hidden but fashionable. He saw a degree of luxury which was to the early Christians, whose ideal was a simple ascetic life, a sin against the poor. He saw a great commercial activity, but a commercial activity so corrupt that it included traffic in slaves and the buying of gladiators to fight to the death in the arena with each other or with beasts for the amusement of the court and populace. And beyond all this Rome slew the saints. "And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth." John knew the city was not wholly vile. There were there some followers of the Lamb. But even these were in peril—peril of corruption, peril of the destruction which overhung the doomed capital. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

3. John was impressed by the Influence of Rome. Not once, but seven times—the number of fullness, com-

pletion—he declares that she has corrupted the whole earth with her fornications. We may wonder how it was possible for one city to throw its vast influence so far, but as a matter of fact every metropolis sends out its own peculiar forces and ideas, for better or worse, to the whole land of which it is the center. The business practice of New York becomes in some degree a standard, a court of comparison and appeal for the country at large. The play which fails in New York goes on tour under an almost fatal handicap—in most cases it does not go at all. Women, from Maine to California ask: "What are they wearing in New York?" And woe to the luckless buyer for a Western or Southern house who fails to bring back to Main Street the authentic styles of Fifth Avenue. New York is like a sounding board. Its echoes go everywhere. It is like a heart which pumps the currents of its life through all the arteries of the nation to its very extremities.

4. John was impressed by the Certainty of Rome's Destruction. No city, no empire, no culture as wicked as this could persist. "The excellent, as God lives, is the permanent," said Emerson. Conversely, the evil is, in the nature of things, the transient. Change the names and the dates, put the Rome Empire in the place of Europe, put the name of some bloody, persecuting Roman in the place of that of the Little Corsican, and John feels concerning the fall of Rome as Victor Hugo felt concerning the fall of Napoleon at Waterloo:

"Was it possible that Napoleon should win this battle? We answer—No! Why? Because of Wellington? Because of Blucher? No! Because of God. . . . It was time that this vast man should fall. The excessive weight of this man in human destiny disturbed the

equilibrium. . . . These plethoras of all human vitality concentrated in a single head, the world mounting to the brain of one man, would be fatal . . . if they should endure. The moment had come for incorruptible supreme equity to look to it. . . . The principles and elements upon which the regular gravitations in the moral order as well as in the material depend, began to murmur. Reeking blood, overcrowded cemeteries, weeping mothers—these are formidable pleaders. . . . Napoleon had been impeached before the Infinite and his fall was decreed. He vexed God. Waterloo is not a battle; it is the change of front of the universe."

John knew that Rome could not last. And the final figure in which he portrays her fall is that of verse 21. "And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all." The figure of a burned city is a strong one (verses 8, 18), but here is a figure more powerful, more deadly. Think of a stone dropped, say, from a ship at sea, dropping down silently, irrevocably; dropping down into eternal oblivion, eternal cold. Fish, cold-blooded, may play about it; the dark vegetable growths of the dim-lit depths may fasten to it; but no human eye shall behold it any more forever. It has gone where it shall never see the sun. "Thus . . . shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all." "And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee, and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; And the light of a candle

shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived."

Two lessons.

*a.* The profound responsibility of the church in a great city. Let us put the lesson in Christ's own words: "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."

*b.* The second lesson is one for every city, and every individual. Let us hear the lesson as John gives it, not in Revelation, nor in his Gospel, but in his first Epistle: "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

## Chapter XXVI

## PRAISE; A MARRIAGE; AND A VICTORY

### Revelation 19

CHAPTER eighteen presented a detailed judgment upon the woman-city, Rome. Chapter 19, verses one to six, sounds the chorus of the praises of heaven for that judgment, and leads to the sharply contrasting marriage of the Lamb and the Bride in verse 7.

Verse 1. "Alleluia." The word occurs four times in this chapter, verses 1, 3, 4, 6, and not elsewhere in the New Testament. Its equivalent, "Praise ye Jehovah," is frequent in the Old Testament. "Unto the Lord our God," as the origin and source of judgment.

Verse 5. "Out of," that is, from the direction of.

Verse 7. The Lamb is Christ; the wife, the church. This is an important verse because it introduces a series of visions concerning the final union of Christ and the church as shown in the two final chapters. The figure of the wife or bride as the church again derives from the Old Testament, where so often the relation between God and his people is set forth as a marriage relation. Compare Hosea 2. 19; Isaiah 54. 1-8.

Verse 8. "Clean and white." Literally, "bright and pure." In contrast to the not immaculate purple and scarlet of the evil woman of 17. 4.

Verse 10. Possibly we have here a protest against angel-worship which was beginning to creep into the church. Compare Colossians 2. 18. "Testimony of Jesus." The most probable meaning: The whole sum of the revelation given by, and in Christ. "For the

testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." A difficult phrase, but best understood thus: The spirit of prophecy is not the instrument of unregulated fancy, but is under the control of the spirit which was in Jesus.

Verse 11. This verse opens the closing section of the book. The partial, adumbrative prophecies of the foregoing chapters are gathered up into a finality forming a prelude to the end of the present world, with the destruction of all wickedness, and the consummation of God's kingdom in righteousness and perfection. "He that sat," that is, Christ.

Verse 12. "Name," that is, the Name that is above every name. The whole chapter is rich in names of Christ. "Lamb," verses 7, 9. "Faithful and True," verse 11; "Word of God," verse 13. "King of kings, Lord of lords," verse 16.

Verse 13. "Vesture dipped in blood." A symbol (a) of conquering power, (b) of atonement. "Word." Only the fourth Gospel so describes the Saviour.

Verse 15. "Out of his mouth, sword," etc. He overthrows his enemies by his words. Careful comparison should be made between this verse and John 12. 48. The last part of the verse derives from Isaiah 11. 4.

Verse 16. "Thigh," that is, on his girdle. This passage inspired the last verse of Francis Thompson's stirring poem, "The Veteran of Heaven."

"What is Thy Name? Oh, show!—'My Name ye may not know;
'Tis a going forth with banners, and a baring of much swords;
But My titles that are high, are they not upon My thigh?
"King of Kings!" are the words, "Lord of Lords!"
It is written "King of Kings, Lord of Lords."

Another poem by the same author, equally striking, "Lilium Regis," printed at the beginning of this volume, portrays the church under persecution.

Verse 17. "In the sun." A place of supernal light and glory befitting the proclaimer of so great a victory. The verse and the following one are in close parallel with Ezekiel 39. 17-20.

Verse 19. "War." Between all temporal powers, including Rome, and the armies of Christ, as predicted in 16. 16.

Verse 20. "Taken," that is, "arrested." A favorite term of the fourth Gospel, where it is used eight times, otherwise only three times in the New Testament. On the close of the verse compare Daniel 7. 11. Isaiah 30. 33.

Verse 21. "Remnant." The rest, the remainder, not necessarily a small number. The kings and armies slain are those who have accepted the rule of the beast. "Sword." Compare comment, verse 15.

### SERMON OUTLINE

"And on his head were many crowns" (Revelation 19. 12).

As a matter of fact there is no room on any one head for more than one crown! But John is a poet. He is never hampered by prosaic fact. One crown may be an honor and distinction for an ordinary king. It is not enough for one who is King of kings. So, in magnificent hyperbole, John says: "On *his* head were *many* crowns."

But is it hyperbole? If we are stolid literalists, yes. But if we have a trace of spiritual imagination, it appeals to us as thrilling truth. On his head were—on

his head are—many crowns. So many that we cannot mention them all, but must pick and choose to keep within the limits of our space.

1. There is the Crown of Humility. He was very God of very God, yet he was born of a woman, in a manger, and lived his early years in a home of poverty. He worked at a carpenter's bench. Entering his ministry he called common men to be his closest companions. While the foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, often the Son of man had not where to lay his head. He lived in humble obedience to his parents' will, as a lad, then to the laws of an alien government, and always to his Father's will. "Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross."

2. There is the Crown of Love. This is the noblest crown that any head may wear. He loved individuals. The one fact which always left Paul well-nigh speechless was this. "He loved me," Paul writes to the Galatians. It was the central fact of Paul's experience. It was a mysterious fact. How was it that when Paul had hated the name of Christ, and had persecuted his followers even unto death, Christ could still love him? And it was a thrilling fact. It made the whole business of religion personal. It made the whole matter of right relation to God individual.

To see religion in this aspect is something sorely needed in our time. Everything, nowadays, tends toward the submergence of the individual personality.

The boy is lost in the school. Stores become department stores and chain stores while the employee becomes a cog in a machine. Even farms, for centuries the strongholds of individualism, are now operated from Washington. A farm is no longer a piece of land. It is something on a filing card in a government bureau. A laborer is swallowed up in a labor union. A church member merges into his church, a church into a denomination, a denomination into the Federal Council of Churches. The church, catching the spirit of the age, forgets one single, solitary, lonely Figure who walked so quietly the paths of Palestine so many years ago, saying to individuals, never to crowds, "Follow me," of whom Paul could write, "*He* loved *me*."

3. There is the Crown of Victory. *a.* Over Self. Christ, even as you and I, had a human nature which had to be subdued and brought under moral control. There was an inner conflict which is not often spoken of in the Gospel, but when it is spoken of, its intensity is made abundantly clear. This is the meaning of the temptations on the mount. Here may be seen, in dramatic portrayal, the moral battle which Jesus had to fight all along the way, but which now became epic. He had fasted forty days. The voice of the tempter said, "Command that these stones be made bread." His answer was: "Man shall not live by bread alone." Then, from the pinnacle of the temple he looked upon the city. "I might throw myself down. I could preserve myself miraculously, and all men would rally to my standard." That, he knew, was a coward's voice, and his higher self replied: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Once more, from a high mountain, he beheld the earth. The tempter's voice whispered:

"Compromise. Put yourself in line with the spirit of the age. Proclaim yourself King Messiah. Rally an army. Throw off the yoke of Rome, and the whole world will acclaim you and follow your banners to the gates of the city of God. The way of the cross is outmoded. Its agonies are unnecessary. The nails and the pain are an idealist's dream of accomplishing that which can be brought to pass in an easier way." His answer was: "Get thee behind me, Satan." Then we read, that the devil "departed from him for a season." But he came back—came back under the olive trees in Gethsemane as Christ faced his imminent cross. "If it be possible, let this cup pass!" "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done," and the victory over self was complete.

*b*. Over Death. When Joseph of Arimathea laid the scarred and broken body of the young man Jesus in the tomb, he doubtless said, as we say, "Death comes to all alike. There is one enemy over whom no man has any power." But Joseph did not understand. No one understood. The first to have a real inkling of the facts were two women in the gray dawn of the first Easter morning. After that the news ran through the land like a tongue of fire across the sky. After that Christ could say: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hades and of death." The man who has the key to a thing is the man who has experienced the thing. Jesus can tell us all we need to know about death because he has tested it for every man. He conquered it in Joseph's garden once for all.

*c*. Over sin. First of all, by the life he lived he showed us what sin is. If any man be in doubt as to

whether a thing be sinful or not, Jesus will tell him. And if a life without sin—sin of omission or commission —be the ideal life, then it may be said Jesus died for an ideal.

"He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by his precious blood.

"There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven, and let us in."

*d.* Over Sorrow. At sometime during the Roman persecutions which were so vividly in the mind of John a young Christian named Sebastian was put to death. Tradition has it that he was shot down with arrows in the Coliseum. A thousand years later Botticelli made this martyrdom the theme of one of his most famous paintings. The picture shows a splendid figure, standing in firm relief, pierced by arrows. We lift our eyes to the face expecting the contortion of agony, or the light of victory, or the true saint's ecstacy, and lo! there is none of this. The features are calm, natural, unchanged. It is Botticelli's way of saying that the believer, in true union with his Lord, is lifted high above pain's ravage, where the slings and arrows, the puncturing irons, the stinging flames, the strong crying and tears cannot come.

What is your sorrow? That deep sorrow of which you cannot speak? The intricate difficulty for which there is no earthly comfort? Bring it to Jesus. His

precepts will enlighten you; his unveiling of God's Fatherhood will comfort you. And if you will open your heart wide to his entrance, his own strength in sorrow shall be yours. He will not only speak to you as he spoke to his disciples in their great sorrow, but you will know what he meant when he said: "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

"And on his head were many crowns." The crown of humility; the crown of love; the crown of victory over self and death and sin and sorrow. Aye, all these and many more were in John's mind when he penned the text. We read in the Gospels of a tortured Man in Pilate's court with a crown of thorns, symbol of his humility and man's hate, pressed down upon his head. We read in the Epistles: "Wherefore God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." We read in Revelation: "On his head were many crowns." Pondering words like these, we see more clearly his indescribable greatness. We feel a profound unworthiness as we behold our drab, imperfect lives in the light of his splendor. And we know a deep joy and a solemn uplifting pride that we have been called to serve a King like this, to know the blessing of his love for us,—a love which endured the cross, despising the shame,—the supreme honor of laboring with him in the accomplishment of his purposes. It is all a matter beyond our power to tell. Perhaps we express our feeling best when we sing:

"The Son of God goes forth to war,
A kingly crown to gain:
His blood-red banner streams afar;
Who follows in his train?

NOTE.—Preaching from this text Dr. Charles E. Jefferson has an impressive sermon on "The Many-sided Christ." He develops the theme by reference to the many different titles which Jesus applies to himself, and by showing the four distinct portraits presented in the four Gospels. Compare Harper's *Monthly Pulpit, "Like a Trumpet,"* (53 *et seq.*)

## Chapter XXVII

## SATAN BOUND; LOOSED; DESTROYED

### Revelation 20

THE chapter falls into a natural division consisting of four parts. Verses one to three show the victory over Satan and his binding. Verses four to six portray the millennial reign. Verses seven to ten refer to a loosing of Satan and a final conflict. Verses eleven to fifteen show forth the general resurrection and the last Judgment.

Since there is some lack of clearness in many minds concerning the teaching of the Reformed churches as to what happens to believers after death, we may well refresh our memories at this point with the words of the Westminster Confession:

"The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls . . . immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. . . . At the last day . . . all the dead shall be raised up with the self-same bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls forever. . . . Then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fullness of joy and refreshing which shall come from the presence of the Lord."

Verse 1. "Bottomless pit." In earlier times the meaning was "abode of the dead," coming afterward to

signify the abode of the powers of evil. Compare 11. 7; 17. 8. The "pit" is not represented here as the place of final punishment, which is, rather, the "lake of fire."

Verse 4. "Thrones." Compare Daniel 7. 9. Matthew 19. 28. "They." To whom the pronoun refers it is impossible to say. Apostles? Saints? Either is possible, as we see from comparison with the references in Matthew and Daniel above and in 1 Corinthians 6. 2, 3. But John leaves the matter indefinite, as we must do. "Beheaded." A humiliation type of martyrdom, as in 11. 8, 9. "Which had not worshiped." Another group of the faithful; they also had resisted unto the death rather than do homage to the beast, Rome. "Thousand years." This is the only passage in the Bible which sets forth with something of clarity the idea that there will be a period of years after the second coming of our Lord when he will reign with his saints, who are resurrected at his coming; and that, at the end of that period, the unrighteous will know resurrection and be judged. In other words there are to be two resurrections—one of the righteous; the other of the unrighteous with Christ's millennial reign between them. There are many good people who believe that this will happen. They are known as Premillenarians.

Verse 5. "Rest," that is, those not martyred.

Verse 6. "Blessed and holy." An incitement to courage and steadfastness under pressure.

Verse 8. "Gog and Magog." In Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39, where these names first appear, they are the names of a prince and the land he rules. Here, perhaps, "Gog" is Rome, and "Magog" the vast dominion under Rome's control.

Verse 9. "Camp" and "beloved city" means the

same, that is, Jerusalam. But the terms are used for the righteous in general. "Fire." Compare Ezekiel 38. 22; 39. 6. "I will send a fire on Magog."

Verse 11. "Throne." Of judgment. "White." Symbol of victory, and of the intensity of the divine purity. "Him that sat." God the Father; but the throne is the throne of God *and* of the Lamb.

Verse 12. "The dead." That is, the "rest of the dead," who "lived not" in verse 5. "Books." Those books in which the deeds of unbelievers were recorded. "Book of life," containing the names of the redeemed. Compare 3. 5; 13. 8; Luke 10. 20; Philippians 4. 3. "According to their works." Compare Romans 2. 6; 1 Corinthians 3. 13-15; 2 Corinthians 11. 15.

Verse 13. "Sea." Emblem of the troubled, unruly nations of the earth. "Hades." The abode into which death ushers all men, no distinction being drawn between the righteous and the wicked. "Death and hell." That is, death and the abode of the dead.

Verse 14. Here, as in 6. 8, is personification, "hades" being put for the power which governs the abode.

Verse 15. "And whosoever was not found written," etc. Those who had finally rejected the good and embraced the evil.

### SERMON OUTLINE

"And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Revelation 20. 4).

Chapter 20, is difficult to understand. Because it is difficult to understand there has been great controversy concerning its meaning. It has been the theater of theological conflicts without number; it has been the battlefield of faction, the seed-bed of strife. It has to

do with the second coming of our Lord; with the millennium; and with the final judgment of the wicked and the rewarding of the righteous. But the main point of controversy has been the second coming.

Christians have always agreed that Christ would return to earth again. Whatever differences have arisen as to the time and the mode of his coming, the hope and faith common to all the debaters is that Jesus will return. There are a considerable number of believers to-day, including scholars of distinction, to whom the coming of the Lord is not a visible return but consists, rather, in his increasing presence and influence in human hearts. It must be said that they are hardly justified in this position on any fair interpretation of Scripture. Christ said: "And they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Making all allowances for imaginative language, these declarations are not descriptions of a process but of an event. Paul says: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." After the ascension of Jesus two men in white apparel spoke to the disciples as they gazed into heaven: "This Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven." These and other statements of the Bible have united most believers in a common hope of the Saviour's reappearance.

While believers generally have cherished the hope, there has been from the earliest history of the church

a sharp divergence of opinion on this point: Will Christ's second coming mark his final triumph over Satan? Or will he reign over a period of years after which Satan will again gain dominion, Christ's lasting triumph, the last Judgment and the erection of the ultimate, perfected kingdom of God being delayed until Satan is vanquished for the second and final time? The Postmillenarians hold to the first view; the Premillenarians to the second. Another point of exact difference between the two groups is this: the Postmillenarians hold that the world will be converted to Christianity before Christ comes in his second advent; the Premillenarians reverse the order, holding that Christ must come before the world can be converted.

The Premillennial view has much in common with the Jewish belief, which was being emphasized at about the time John wrote the Revelation, that the activities of the Jewish Messiah would follow this course of events. It is also worth while to note that the Premillennial view bases itself finally upon this twentieth chapter of Revelation, which is held to be an indisputable proof of the correctness of the Premillennial contention. But is it? That is the real question with which we are now concerned.

1. First, we shall do well to remember that this is the only place in the Bible where this view appears to be taught. The Old Testament knows nothing of a period in which Messiah shall reign in a righteous society over a period of centuries, only to be superseded by Satan, after which there is to be a final overthrow of the devil. Throughout the New Testament, with the possible exception of this passage, the teaching is that when he comes a second time, he will come to

reign eternally. The great historic creeds—the Augsburg Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Apostles' Creed which we repeat, as in the case of the other great creeds, the Nicene and the Athanasian, know nothing of the Premillennial view. In all these it is either a Postmillennial view which is set forth, either directly or by implication, or an A- or Non-millennial view.

"But," say the Premillenarians, "granted all that, or most of it—for we think we find our view hinted at in some other places in the New Testament—there remains the twentieth of Revelation where our belief is clearly taught and admits of no evasion." Bickersteth, one of the most distinguished of the Premillennial school, says: "Here [in Revelation 20. 4-6], is the seat of the doctrine."

But if this is "the seat of the doctrine," it would seem that it is not very firmly in the saddle. Which will you take for your authority, the sober statements of the Gospels and Epistles or the highly symbolic language of Revelation? Suppose you have a reliable historian like McMaster or Rhodes setting down the facts of the Civil War. Then suppose you have a poet like Stephen Vincent Benet writing a history of the war as Benet did under the title, *John Brown's Body*. Which will you take as your standard of authority? Will you try to manipulate McMaster and Rhodes to make their account agree with Benet's account? Not unless you have lost all capacity for judgment. If you manipulate at all, you will do it the other way round. Now, John was a poet, a poet with limitless poetic license. He was influenced by the late Judaistic writers who had a notion of the second and third rise to power

of their Messiah. A poet must never be understood too literally, too factually. And as between the historian and the poet, as between the literal prophecies of the Gospels and Epistles, and the symbolic, imaginative, poetical prophecies of Revelation, our choice is clear. The idea of our chapter of two resurrections of the dead, and two judgments, if taken literally, runs squarely against the other teachings of Scripture that Christ's second coming is a consummation, and that the righteous and the wicked are raised up together in one final resurrection for one final judgment.

What, then, is the meaning of the text, "And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years"? We cannot accept the Premillennial view because it runs against other Scripture, and the historic creeds of the church. Nor can we accept, *without qualification,* the Postmillennial view that the thousand years is the period in which we are now living between the first and second comings. Certainly, in our time Satan is not bound, in any real sense; Christ is not reigning in any universal sense. Satan bound and Christ reigning *now?* Anyone who sees the fleet in the Hudson, and remembers the World War, and knows that the United States proposes to build one hundred and one more ships, knows this is no millennium. Satan bound and Christ reigning *now?* Millions starving throughout the world and crime rampant make answer. Satan is more hampered than he was before Christ came. Christ has more disciples than any other religion can boast. But the devil still walketh as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour and Christ is crucified afresh every day. What we must do is seek a more reasonable, a more spiritual interpretation.

Let us conceive that the thousand years is not a period of time at all. It is a symbol of completeness. First, of the complete victory over sin wrought by Christ on his cross, not yet consummated; second, the complete inner victory which the disciple obtains in the end through belief in the Crucified. The Saviour wrought a complete victory in dying; it will be manifested in triumphant lives when Christ comes in his glory at the last trump.

But is not this a more fantastic interpretation than either of the others? Not if we remember that in this chapter John is drawing largely upon the language of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel uses the symbol of "years" precisely as we find it used here—to denote a complete period of time. Space forbids extended references to the passage, but it will be found in Ezekiel, chapter thirty-nine. This passage in Ezekiel is before John's mind as he writes. It is the foundation upon which his whole delineation rests.

The thousand years, when connected with the binding of Satan, represent the completeness in future, but not the consummation in the present, of his overthrow. When connected with the saints, the thousand years represent the saints' confirmation in happiness to be made complete, final, and manifest, at the last day, when even their enemies shall see their victory. In a certain sense we are now living in the thousand years. Ever since, as individuals, we believed in Christ we have been under his protection; living in the power of his resurrection life. Ever since Christ was crucified his dominion has been gaining in completeness. He himself said when he walked among us: "*Now* is the judgment of this world; *now* shall the prince of this world

be cast out." Though Satan is not wholly bound, neither is he fully free. In the limitations which are put upon him by the power of Christ working in the world even now we can see the sure prophecy of Evil's final overthrow. There is a sense in which, for the believer, Satan is bound. He is beneath their feet. He has no full dominion over them. Yet the fact remains that he brings them trial, tribulation, and failure. The object of the passage before us is to show that there is another side to the picture, and that that side, long hidden, shall be at length revealed. Just as once in his earthly life Jesus was transfigured, his glory shining forth in the presence of his disciples, so now he is to be wholly glorified with a glory revealed at the last day, and the hidden glory of his followers shall then be revealed also. This completed glory, manifest before heaven and earth, is symbolized in the completion-figure of the thousand years. With this thought John comforted a persecuted church. In this interpretation the Millennium is resolved into a figure of speech. So John intended it. The idea of any millennial reign of Jesus and his saints between a first and second resurrection should be dismissed from our minds.[1]

But why lay such stress upon the matter?

In the first place, we have been trying through many chapters to make a serious study of the book of Revela-

[1] There are many who assume that there are only two possible positions, the Pre- and the Postmillennial. But the A- or Non-millennial as given above is that, in general, of Reformed and Lutheran theology. It is implied, if not expressly stated in the Westminster Standards. It is the view taught over the years by Doctor Geerhardus Vos and Professor Louis Berkhof. It is set forth by such writers as William Masselink and Philip Mauro, and seems to be gaining favor steadily in the thought of our time.

tion. As we come to this chapter we cannot honestly evade the central problem which it presents. In the second place the doctrine of Premillenarianism has had, and is having to-day, practical, and important, and unfortunate effects upon the life of the Christian Church.

These unfortunate effects upon the life of the church —what are they? We can only mention three. First, it makes the church inept. Now it is a strange fact, but a fact nevertheless, that those who hold the Premillennial view are forever obsessed with the idea of fixing the exact date of Christ's second coming. Why this should be so no one knows, but it is so. Time prevents reference to the many examples of this. Let us refer in the briefest way to two. William Miller began to lecture in New York state in 1831, and fixed the time of Christ's Advent in 1843. His followers, known as the Millerites, were thrown into great excitement and put on white robes in which to meet Christ as the date approached. When it came and passed, Miller wrote a letter acknowledging his "error" and announced the next year as the proper date, and said if Christ did not appear then, he should feel twice the disappointment he had already felt!

And now for a more modern instance. In 1917 the following statement was issued to the churches of England and the world, under the title, "The Significance of the Hour."

1. That the present crisis points toward the close of the times of the Gentiles.

2. That the revelation of our Lord may be expected at any moment, when he will be manifested as evidently to his disciples as on the evening of his resurrection.

3. That the completed church will be translated to be "forever with the Lord."

4. That Israel will be restored to its own land in unbelief and be afterward converted by the appearance of Christ on its behalf.

5. That all human schemes of reconstruction must be subsidiary to the second coming of our Lord, because all nations will then be subject to his rule.

6. That under the reign of Christ there will be a further great effusion of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh.

7. That the truths embodied in this statement are of the utmost practical value in determining Christian character and action with reference to the pressing problems of the hour.

To this statement were appended many distinguished names, among them G. Campbell Morgan, H. Webb-Peploe, and J. Stuart Holden. One is suprised to find these names signed to a document like this, which has already taken its place in the museum of Premillenarian curiosities, while the judicious grieve, and the world smiles. If only these brethren with their dates and diagrams and charts could remember the words of Christ: "For the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false . . . prophets, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before, Wherefore if they say unto you, Behold he is in the desert; go not forth. Behold he is in the secret chambers, believe it not."

Again, the Premillenarian view not only weakens the church before the world, it makes it impotent in facing its task. It is a counsel of pessimism. It proceeds on

the assumption that the gospel does not have the power to convert the world and was never intended to do so. It is to be preached, of course, but it will never be generally accepted. But Christ taught otherwise. In the parable of the mustard-seed he taught that the gospel is to convert the world. He taught it in the parable of the leaven. He gave as his last command "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations." If the gospel has not the power to convert the world, then the Great Commission is a futile command, a pathetic, delusive dream. If all Premillenarians are not pessimistic, it is because they are superior to their logic. Their logic is inherently pessimistic. It teaches that the world is essentially and hopelessly evil and cannot grow better under the preaching of the gospel, but must grow worse and worse until Christ appears to end its immedicable misery in Judgment and destruction.

So, in spite of what a literal reading of our chapter might give us, we take another view. We do not stand gazing up into heaven. We strive to build a city of God upon the earth. We have penetrated every continent with the gospel, planted the gospel in every island, flung our outposts around the equator from pole to pole. Christianity has grown more in the last hundred years than in the preceding eighteen hundred—in spite of Voltaire's prophecy uttered in 1760, "Ere the beginning of the nineteenth century Christianity will have disappeared from the earth."

We do not believe that the perfecting of the world depends wholly upon a second coming of Christ. It is being perfected now by the power of his gospel. We preach and pray and strive that the day may more speedily come when the earth shall be ready for his

return; when by the proclamation of the gospel the number of the unrepentant and the incorrigible shall have been reduced to the lowest possible point. At his coming the world will not be perfect, but it will be infinitely better than it now is. He will set up the final Kingdom of Righteousness, whether upon this planet or elsewhere we do not know. This is the blessed hope. It is not our primary task to watch for the coming of Christ, but to do his work, to tell his story,

"Till like a sea of glory
It spreads from pole to pole;
Till o'er our ransomed nature
The Lamb for sinners slain,
Redeemer, King, Creator,
In bliss returns to reign."

## Chapter XXVIII

# NO DARKNESS AND NO TEARS

### Revelation 21. 1 to 22. 5

THE Judgment is done. The Lamb has triumphed. John will now show Christ's union with his church in glory and perfection. In chapter twenty-one, verses one to eight, we have a short, concise account of the vision. This account is expanded, beginning at verse nine, and continuing through to chapter twenty-two, verse five.

The church, in all ages, has found in this passage a description of heaven. John's portrayal is that of a perfected society dwelling upon an earth so renovated (made new), that both the society and its dwelling place is without flaw. It is natural and right to associate John's conception with heaven, for if this be not heaven, what is?

Verse 1. "New heaven, . . . earth." Not created anew, but renovated, perfected. New characteristics adapted to new ends. The old heaven and earth bore the aspects of the perishable, the new is fitted for everlastingness and sinlessness. "No more sea." Meanings. *a.* Unruly, restless men no longer exist. *b.* A thing which was fearsome has been done away. The ancients feared the sea. The Greek classics tell the story of the dread with which they approached any voyage far from land.

Verse 2. "Holy city, new Jerusalem." The rabbinic

writers spoke of a Jerusalem of "the world to come" which would be congruent to but different from the Jerusalem they knew. Compare also Galatians 4. 26; Hebrews 12. 22. The new Jerusalem will be described more fully in succeeding verses, but two characteristics are given here. It comes from heaven. It is adorned as a bride. Compare Isaiah 61. 10 through 62. 5; also Matthew 22. 2; 25. 10; Luke 12. 36.

Verse 3. "Tabernacle," etc. A reference to the tabernacle in the wilderness as the dwelling place of God. Then it was for a tribe; now for all men.

Verse 4. "Crying." An acute cry produced by any pain. "Pain." The burden of any woe of any kind. These troubles belonged to an old order now passed away.

Verse 5. "He." God, now in direct contact with his people.

Verse 6. "It is done." The words connect with verse 5. All new things, in heaven and in earth, are come to pass. "I will give." Not the full salvation, for that is already given, but the desire to enter farther and farther into the experience of it.

Verse 7. "My son." God's Son. Again, echoes of the Old Testament. Compare Genesis 17. 7, 8; 2 Samuel 7. 14; Jeremiah 24. 7. The promise made first to Abram, founder of the Hebrew nation, then to Samuel and Jeremiah, representative prophets, is now, through Christ, the heritage of all believers.

Verse 8. "Fearful," that is, craven, cowardly, in contrast with those who have bravely overcome. "Unbelievers." Those who are recreant to the faith; recanters. "Abominable." Those tainted with heathen abominations. "Idolaters." The primary reference is doubtless

to emperor-worshipers. "Liars." In all his writings John shows a passionate devotion to *truth.*

Verse 9. The author now gives a detailed description of the city of God. This began in verse 2 but was interrupted by the voices which accompanied the vision. "Wife." The glorified, perfected church.

Verse 10. "Great and high mountain." The language here and in the following verses derives from Ezekiel. Compare Ezekiel 40. 2ff.

Verse 11. "Light." The splendor of the divine glory. "Jasper." Probably a diamond.

Verse 12. Compare Ezekiel 48. 31ff. "At the gates." Literally, "In charge of the gates."

Verse 15. Compare Ezekiel 40. 3ff.

Verse 16. A cube of thirteen hundred miles in each dimension, which is, of course, pure poetic fantasy.

Verse 17. "Man, that is . . . angel." Meanings: *a.* The city is not framed for angelic, but human, purposes. *b.* Mathematics are absolute in every sphere, both for angels and men.

Verse 18. The city described is ideally perfect. The description is far removed from any realm of reality.

Verse 19. Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible,* "Stones, Precious," gives an instructive account of the gems mentioned in this and the following verses.

Verse 22. Formerly the temple localized God. Now there is no need of this, for the whole divine society is interfused with him.

Verse 23. Compare Isaiah 60. 19; John 8. 12.

Verse 24. Not only the masses of the people, but their highest representatives as well shall walk in the "light."

Verse 25. Ancient cities shut their gates at night

against their enemies, both men and wild beasts. Now there are no enemies and no night.

Verse 26. Since the gates are ever open, kings may bring their tribute at any time. "Nations" here, as in chapter 22. 2, has occasioned a difficulty. Heretofore in Revelation the word has referred to heathen peoples. So, it has been inferred, there are still nations to be converted, in John's vision. But this does violence to the context. The reference is undoubtedly to nations, groups, communities, of the redeemed.

Verse 27. No evil shall enter, for there is no evil.

Chapter 22, verse 1. The language derives from the description of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2. 10.

Verse 2. In the original Eden there was one such tree. Here the streets are lined with them. The rivers and the streets run side by side throughout the city. In the space between river and street are rows of the tree of life. The fruit of the trees, for healing and for nourishment, never fails.

Verse 3. "No more curse." No accursed thing to be a barrier to right living. "The throne of God and of the Lamb." A thoroughly Johannine phrase. Compare John 14. 23. "Serve," etc. Literally, "His bond servants shall render him the service of ministry."

Verse 4. They shall serve with unhindered vision and undivided love, for "they shall see his face." Such privilege was denied under the former dispensation. Compare Exodus 33. 20. But it was anticipated as an exceeding great reward. Psalm 17. 15. Foretold as the reward of the pure in heart. Matthew 5. 8. Promised as a condition of perfect conformity to Christ. 1 John 3. 2; 1 Corinthians 13. 12.

Verse 5. "And there shall be no night there." "We

have already had a similar statement in 21. 25, but it is now repeated in a different connection and with a different purpose. Then it was to indicate that the gates shall be continually open so that the redeemed may continually enter with their gifts in order to magnify the King. Now it is to show that, having entered, they shall suffer no interruption in their joyful service, and shall need no nightly rest to recruit the weary frame for the service of the following day. They shall always be strong and vigorous for the service of the Lord. 'And they need no lamp.' Did they need light of lamp or sun, it would show that they were still amidst the changes of this fleeting scene, for the lamp wastes as it burns, and the sun hastens daily to its setting. But He who is without variableness or shadow cast by turning is now their light, and that light never fades. As their frame never wearies for service, so the conditions necessary for the accomplishment of that service never fail. 'And they shall reign forever and ever.' The transition is sudden, almost startling, for we have been reading only of service. Yet it is eminently characteristic of Saint John, who constantly delights at the close of a passage to return to his earlier steps, and to close as he had begun. He has reached the consummation of the happiness of the saints of God, and of what can it remind him but of his earliest words, words too, the echo of which has run throughout the Apocalypse: 'And he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father' (chapter 1. 6). It is true the redeemed are priests, but they are more than priests. He with whom they are one is 'a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,' both priest and king. In like manner they are both priests and kings; they 'sit down with their

Lord in his throne, even as he also overcame, and sat down with his Father in his throne' (chapter 3. 21). They share the divine authority over all things around them, and their authority is without interruption and without end. They reign 'forever and ever.' "[1]

### SERMON OUTLINE

"The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal" (Revelation 21. 16).

Here is a city in the form of a cube. It is thirteen hundred miles long. That is perhaps conceivable. A good many years ago a man wrote a book called *Road-town,* the idea being that a city would be strung along a road for miles, a single row of houses on either side. Recently Frank Lloyd Wright, America's architectural genius, has been advocating something of the kind. The city of our text is to be thirteen hundred miles wide, and possibly such a city could be envisaged. But it is also to be thirteen hundred miles high! And at that point the imagination goes on strike. The figure of speech moves completely beyond the realm of fact and human experience. We find we are dealing with a symbol. A symbol of what? It is a symbol of symmetry. Not the beauty, nor the power, nor the ingenuity of a divine society, nor any one particular is indicated, but the fact that it will be fully rounded, complete, in perfect balance—an absolute symmetry. But if the society is to be symmetrical, then the individuals who compose it must be symmetrical. And so our thoughts are led to the symmetry of the individual life.

1. This ideal life has *length.* Not necessarily

[1] William Milligan in *Expositors Bible.* Used by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

length of years, but it stretches right on and out in a continuity of purpose. We all know the type of man who is forever changing jobs. He has no continuity, no gift of continuance. He may seem to be going somewhere for a time, then a detour invites and he never gets back on the main road. His life's trail is a zigzag. He plows no straight furrow because he does not put his eye on a mark at the end of the field and go straight through. Such a life has no outstretching longitude. It has only a kind of vague, wavering latitude. It lacks in prolongation. It has no "length."

Now, this is bad enough. It spells certain failure. But there is a type of life which is even worse. It is the type which has nothing but length. It is a life of one dimension. It ignores everything except the set goal. It is like a limited express. The one idea of the Twentieth Century Limited is to get to Chicago. It doesn't really stop anywhere. It may pause fretfully at Albany, Buffalo, or Cleveland, but at most places it doesn't even hesitate. On its steel rails its steel flanges hold an unalterable course. If anything gets in the way, either the obstacle or the train will be smashed, probably the obstacle, for the train knows no compromise—and its momentum usually carries it triumphantly through. Now, a life like that certainly has one admirable quality—directness, singlemindedness. But it is an unbalanced, therefore an unlovely life. It has length—in the sense of continuity of purpose—but it has neither breadth nor height.

2. But what does *breadth* stand for? It stands for the human relationships. It stands for insight and sympathy and sacrifice in our relations with our fellow men. It stands for a certain quality of selflessness with-

out which no life can be symmetrical. It has its perils of course. It can melt down into sentimentality. It can so blind a man to human faults that he finds more beauty and nobility of character in a brutal murderer than in the murderer's victim. It may become so prominent that it makes any sort of effective continuity in one's own affairs impossible. But few men are so. With most of us it is the other way round. Most men, and women, grow more and more self-centered with the passing of the years. The struggle for existence is difficult; there isn't much time to think of others if we are to eat and be clothed ourselves. The ingratitude of someone we have tried to help tends to embitter us. The lateral outreach of our sympathies is checked; the forward push intensifies. And we say, "If we are going to get anywhere, we must keep to the road and look out for number one."

> "Let me live in a house by the side of the road
> And be a friend to man"?

A poet's dream! Sometime maybe, but most certainly not now. And so again life grows unbalanced, and the length and the breadth and the height of it are not equal.

But in the ideal life, the text insists, the length and the breadth and the height of it *are* equal. If the length means a steady progression toward certain definite, worthy ends; if the breadth means the outreach in love toward one's fellow men, what is meant by the height?

3. It means the upreach of the life toward God. It is not something distinct from length and breadth. It is a part of a movement of the whole nature upward.

It means to be in the world but not of it. It means facing up toward heavenly places, but keeping our feet firmly on the ground.

A man says: "I believe in 'length.' I have a job to do; a career to make. I will keep my eye on the goal. I don't worry about God." Another man says: "I believe in 'breadth.' My religion is the religion of humanity. I aim to help my brother man. I don't worry about God." But a one-dimension life is an abnormal life. A third may say, "I do my work, and I try to help my neighbor." Yes, but the two dimensions—length and breadth—make a plain, a flat, monotonous plain. Why not have a mountain where the eye can rest on something infinitely higher than oneself or one's surroundings? The plain grows dull, tedious, wearisome. And without mountains whence rivers run down to water the plain, the plain becomes a desert.

Length, breadth, height—energy, love, faith—these make the symmetrical man. When Paul says, "I press toward the mark for the prize," he tells us what life's length, its continuing purpose, is for him. When he writes, "I will gladly spend and be spent for you," he depicts his conception of life's breadth. When he declares, "God . . . hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," he makes clear that his spiritual upreach is nothing less than the altitude of the throne of God. And when we attempt to analyze the symmetrical character of the Tarsan, these three utterances lead us to the inner secrets of his lofty soul.

Listen to Jesus: "To this end was I born, for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the truth." That is the length of life for him.

"For their sakes I sanctify myself." There is the breadth of life for him. "Now, O Father, glorify thou me." There is the height. Leaving any one of these dimensions out, we fail of the symmetry of true manhood and womanhood. Putting them all in, in due proportion and relation, we grow toward perfection—into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

## Chapter XXIX

# CONFIRMATION; AUTHENTICATION; BENEDICTION

### Revelation 22. 6-21

IN CHAPTER one, verses one to eight, we found the prologue to the book of Revelation. Now, at the end of chapter twenty-two we find the epilogue. It consists of four parts. In verses six to nine we have a confirmation of John's revelation spoken by an angel. Verses ten to fifteen are made up of warnings and confirming promises. Verses sixteen to twenty present the solemn witness of Christ himself to the authenticity and authority of the foregoing visions. Verse twenty-one is a benediction similar to those used to close other apostolic letters of the New Testament. In chapter one, verse three, we read: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy." This, taken together with the benediction which closes the book, indicates quite clearly that John expected his writing to be read in the services of Christian congregations, as we know other Epistles were intended to be read.

It has been felt by various commentators that the many unconnected thoughts of this passage, the interruptions and repetitions, and the abrupt introduction of new speakers indicate a severely dislocated text. R. H. Charles makes much of what he considers a flat contradiction between 21. 1, 2, and 22. 11. Thus critics have been led to strenuous efforts to reconstruct the or-

der of the verses, but have been unable to arrive at any unanimity of opinion. John's habit of abrupt transitions, in evidence throughout the book, should minimize our difficulties here and restrain us from the even greater difficulties involved in reconstruction. As for the contradiction referred to by Charles, it is true that 21. 1, 2 portrays a new and sinless world. But in 22. 11 John's mind reverts for the moment to the time before the new heaven and the new earth were established.

Verse 6. "He." That is, the "angel" of 1. 1 who was especially designated to convey the divine message to the seer. "These words," that is, the contents of the book. "Sayings . . . faithful and true." The messages partake of the nature of him from whom they come. "Lord God of the holy prophets." Here, and elsewhere John indicates by a turn of phrase his identification with the prophetic office and succession. The Revised Version reads "The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets."

Verse 7. These are the words of Christ, but not necessarily spoken by him. Probably the angel is repeating and reporting them on Christ's behalf. "Blessed," etc. Compare 1. 3. "Prophecy." John again emphasizes his prophetic function.

Verse 8. "I, John," etc. A solemn assertion of his actual beholding and appointed reception of the visions. Compare Daniel 12. 5; Revelation 1. 9.

Verse 9. The angel, prophets, and those who keep the sayings of the book are placed upon an equality of honor.

Verse 10. "He." Since the speaker has refused worship and claimed rank only with the prophets, it is impossible to conclude that the pronoun refers to

Christ in person. We are to understand that the angel still speaks in the name of the Saviour. "Seal not." In contrast to Daniel 12. 4 and to the instructions given John in 10. 4. The contrast in the instruction is due to the fact that the final Judgment is now seen in the imminent future.

Verse 11. Two meanings have been generally given to these words. *a.* Judgment is so near there is now no time for change. *b.* Christ having revealed himself as the way of salvation, nothing further can be done for sinful men. It is in accordance with the spirit of the book throughout to understand the verse as applying only to the moment when judgment breaks upon the unrighteous; the end of choice and opportunity; the bridegroom coming and the door shut once for all. As Browning writes in "Easter Day":

> "I felt begin
> The Judgment Day: to retrocede
> Was too late now. 'In very deed,'
> (I uttered to myself) 'that Day!'
> The intuition burned away
> All darkness from my spirit too:
> There, stood I, found and fixed, I knew
> Choosing the world. The choice was made,
> And naked and disguiseless stayed,
> And unevadable, the fact.
> . . . . . .
> "A final belch of fire like blood,
> Overbroke all heaven in one flood
> Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky
> Fire, and both, one brief ecstasy,
> Then ashes. But I heard no noise
> (Whatever was) because a voice
> Beside me spoke thus, 'Life is done,
> Time ends, Eternity's begun,
> And thou art judged forevermore.'"

Verse 12. "Reward . . . as his work shall be." In consonance with Christ's parables of the ten virgins, the talents, and the pounds.

Verse 13. "I am Alpha and Omega." Here and in 1. 11 it is Christ who claims the title. In 1. 8 and 21. 6 it is the Father. Alford and some other commentators hold that it is the Father speaking in every case; that when Christ seems to speak in his own authority he is really speaking for the Father; an interpretation which is not upheld by the weight of scholarship.

Verse 14. To be understood in connection with 7. 14.

Verse 15. Here, as in 21. 8, the list of iniquities climaxes on the love and practice of falsehood.

Verse 16. Christ now speaks in *propria persona.* He puts emphasis on "Jesus" as the name of a historic Person known in the church. "Jesus" occurs some fourteen times in Revelation, nearly always in connection with his function as a revealer of truth, a "witness." The fourth Gospel puts a similar stress upon the revealing function of our Lord. "You." Plural, referring to John and possibly other prophets.

Verse 17. The verse offers difficulties of interpretation which have led to wide differences of opinion. Beckwith holds that the words are all spoken by John; that he uses "heareth" because the passage will be read in Christian congregations, and that these hearers are incited to cry for Christ's coming. The most probable meaning is that the spirit in the church and the church cry "Come." Then Christ speaks. "Let him that is athirst"—that is, all who desire a deeper knowledge of salvation—"say, Come, O Christ, and take freely the water which I offer." A poetical interpretation

of the thought may be found in Tennyson's "St. Agnes' Eve."

"He lifts me to the golden doors;
The flashes come and go;
All heaven bursts her starry floors,
And strews her lights below,
And deepens on and up! the gates
Roll back, and far within
For me the Heavenly Bridegroom waits,
To make me pure of sin.
The sabbaths of Eternity,
One sabbath deep and wide—
A light upon the shining sea—
The Bridegroom with his bride!"

(Doctor Wishart, in *The Book of Day,* draws the striking analogies between the first book of the Bible and the last with much beauty and suggestiveness. Compare pp. 16, 17.)

### SERMON OUTLINE

Revelation 22. 16, 17, 21.

We come now to our last study in the book of Revelation. We have wandered, wondering, among the visions of the seer of Patmos. We have encountered things strange and marvelous. Now we see one from whose mouth emerges a two-edged sword. Now one sits on a throne with a rainbow round about, while lightnings and thunders issue from it. Now we see six-winged beasts. Now we behold a Lamb as it had been slain having seven horns and seven eyes. Now we see an angel standing in the sun. We have also beheld terrible things. Visions of cities ransacked and their inhabitants destroyed. Visions of the powers of hell let loose, figured forth as beasts and dragons. We have

seen the Four Horsemen riding—the white horse of conquest, the red horse of war, the black horse of famine, the livid-green corpse-hued horse of death. We have seen cavalry horses with scorpions in their tails. We have seen horrible plagues visited upon the wicked. We have heard the crash of war even in heaven. Strange and ominous have been the woes and the judgments set before us with a dramatic power which has often made us quail, and which has made us long with deep desire for things more sweet and beautiful.

That desire is abundantly fulfilled in the last two chapters of the book. Reading Revelation is like riding in a railway train through a long, dark, dripping tunnel, then emerging into sunlight and flowered meadows. It is like a holy armistice after a cruel war. It is like voyaging on a raft through perilous rapids in mountain gorges, then floating clear on the broad reaches of a river which flows unvexed to the sea. The beauty and peace of the last two chapters form a welcome contrast to the wildness and terror which precedes.

Some of this beauty and peace we experienced as we read once more, in chapter twenty-one, of a redeemed and perfected society figured for us in a city of amazing beauty and symmetry, her foundations garnished with precious stones, her twelve gates twelve pearls, her streets of pure gold with streams crystal clear and trees of life on either hand, a city in which there was no more pain, nor sorrow, nor crying, for God himself dwelt in it and had wiped all tears from human eyes. The passage which ends the book is only slightly less beautiful. In it there are three things which may guide our meditation.

1. We have in verse sixteen the Last Title of Christ in the Bible. "The bright and morning star." He gives it to himself. In the Gospels he tells us that he is the Good Shepherd; the Bread of Life; the True Vine; the Light of the World. But here, in the last chapter of the last book, is a title of surpassing beauty. A star has ineffable dignity. A star shines in the darkness. A star is a symbol of hope. By their unalterable rhythm of movement stars have been guides for men on land and sea from time immemorial. But the Master speaks of himself here as a morning star. He reminds us that he is no mere name of tender recollection, no dear relic of a perished past, not like something to be drawn in silence from a chest and sprinkled with the hot tears of hopeless memory. He is alive forevermore. He is a pledge of reviving life, the harbinger of a day of gladness. He who trod the common way; who was tempted in all points even as we; who knows our sorrows and failures and disappointments, is still our Guide, our Hope, our Joy, our Comforter in every dark night whilst we are wishing for the dawn. It is a name to thrill the heart, to quicken our sense of his ineffable glory. It was spoken for John in one of the world's darkest hours, when brute, godless power ruled from the throne of the Cæsars, and the things of the spirit seemed crushed out. Now, in another troubled time, to meditate upon its meaning is to take heart and renew our strength.

2. We have in verse seventeen the Last Invitation of the Bible. "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Always the Bible shows God as seeking to turn men to himself. That is the meaning of all Scripture. And there is no invitation anywhere

in its pages more winsome than this. Where there is no water there is death. If there is water and men refuse to drink it, still there is death. But the water of life is free. It is plentiful. If men refuse it and prefer spiritual death, they have only themselves to blame. It is not God's fault but their own. And the taking of this water is such a simple thing! Yonder in the park there is a drinking fountain. The water bubbles up continually. You do not even have to touch a device of any kind to bring it. But you do have to stoop. You must bow your head to drink. Yonder is a cold mountain stream flowing down from the snow-capped hills. There beside the little bridge hangs an old dipper. All you have to do is stoop and dip the water up. And all that you have to do to obtain the water of life is to bow the whole personality in the presence of Jesus and take that which he offers, to trust the poor sinful self wholly and confidently and constantly and obediently to him. That is all. But there is where the difficulty comes. Our pride forbids us to comply. When Naaman was told to wash in the Jordan for his leprosy, he was in a towering passion. But his servants said: "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, wash and be clean?" There are those who would rather do as the Hindus—stick hooks in the muscles of the back and swing from the end of a rope to achieve salvation, than to come to Christ saying, "Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to thy cross I cling." Are you athirst? Longing for some deeper experience of the Infinite which will calm your unrest and put you in a right and renewed relationship with God? Then take Christ's gift to you on his terms, live

by faith in him, communion with him, and obedience to him. Then the world may yield you or deny you her waters, but you will possess a fountain of waters leaping up into everlasting life.

3. Again, in verse twenty-one we have the Last Benediction of the Bible. It is well worthy of notice that this great volume, with its sixty-six books, gives us a blessing as its last word. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." It is a wish that the grace of Christ may be reproduced in us.

But what is grace? It is one of the mighty words of the Bible. We use it often. We understand it little. The grace of Christ is, first, his kindness, the good will of his love. It is the filial love which laid down the consciousness of genius and all its impulses for thirty years at the feet of his mother in a quiet, obscure life which won her pondering and passionate love. It is the penetrating affection which saw into the character of his friends and made them believe in their capacity for greatness, which led men like Peter and John and James to find out and love one another, which bound his followers together in a love which outlasted death. It is the tender insight which saw into the publican's heart; which, when the sinner drew near in tears, believed in her repentance and exalted her to be a saint; which had compassion on the weariness of the multitude and on the weariness of the few; which in all times and circumstances said the right, and never the weak, thing.

But the grace of Christ is more than this. It is a value which he created upon his cross. That value is our free gift when we accept him and the work he did on our behalf, by faith. That value, that gift, is the

forgiveness of our sins. It is the gift of the beginning of a process which restores us at last to the image of God. His grace does not end with insight and courtesy and sympathy and charm. It goes on and climaxes in an agonizing death that we may be saved. "Whosoever will let him come." The last word of the Bible to us is a deep, passionate desire that we accept the grace of Christ, be like him, and be saved by his sacrifice.

With the last title of Christ in the Bible—the bright and morning star; with the last invitation of the Bible —whosoever will; with the last consummate wish of the Bible—that we may possess and experience the grace of Christ, we bid farewell to the mighty poem which is called the Revelation of Saint John. We have ended our adventure in the isle called Patmos where the sea thundered long in storm but ended in a song of victory and peace. For the most part we have been children picking a few shells and pebbles from the beach. But at times, out of the tempest and sunshine, the turmoil and the peace, the thunders and lightnings and the sparkling river, there have come to us glimpses of the eternal. At times we have seen heaven opened. At times the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world has become to us a more precious sacrifice than before. And always we have learned this: Eye hath not seen nor ear heard the things God hath prepared for them that love him. And we know, better than before, that the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

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